Seeking Asylum in Bangkok, Thailand

Surviving, Coping, and the Wellbeing Strategies of Palestinian-Syrian Refugees

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To Maher

May you be born into and grow up in a world full of peace, empathy, and acceptance.

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To the refugees in Bangkok and the world; may you be well. Let us hope for a better world, where we are all welcomed and there are no borders.

Contents

Main Research Participants

Suan Luang Community

Nadia, a woman in her 50s, fled Syria and travelled to Bangkok from a rural area in the outskirts of Damascus in Spring 2013, where she and her family lived on a small farm. She travelled with her husband, five adult sons, their three wives, and her four grandchildren. They fled Syria after her eldest son Faruk (35) was released as a political prisoner to seek a better life for her sons and grandchildren. Faruk's wife Ayda was the main caretaker of the family once in Bangkok.

Amer, Nadia's brother, who was in his early 40s, fled Syria two weeks after his sister with his wife Rana, his mother, and his two young children. Amer was a railway engineer in Syria and also lived on a farm outside of Damascus. They fled Syria after the area where they lived was overcome with fighting and the force from the bombs had shattered all the windows of their home. Amer and his sister Nadia broke ties roughly six to nine months after arriving in Bangkok.

Ziad and Reema, both in their early 20s, were married four days before they fled Damascus in spring 2013 to seek asylum in Bangkok. Reema was an engineer and Ziad was a translator. Ziad was avoiding military conscription, and both wanted to start their lives together somewhere safe, where they had the space to hope for a bright future. Reema and Ayda are cousins.

Ibrahim, 23, fled Syria just weeks after he received his final marks from his undergraduate degree in Economics in autumn 2013. His family refused to leave Syria and he was due to report to the military for mandatory service, so took the solo journey to Bangkok to seek safety. Nadia and Amer are his aunt and uncle and he slept on the living room floor in Nadia's apartment. He attributes his flawless English to watching episodes of the TV show Big Bang Theory.

Ramkanhaeng Community

Mohammed, in his late 40s, worked as an engineer in Dubai while his family lived in the Yarmouk camp in Syria. Due to conflict, Mohammed moved back to Syria to be with his family. His wife Fatima, their four children, her two brothers, and her brother's children fled in autumn 2012 when fighting broke out in the Yarmouk camp and they felt there was no future for their family in Damascus. They were the first Palestinian-Syrian family to seek asylum in Bangkok.

Ahmed, also in his late 40s fled to Bangkok with his wife Abeer and her four children. Ahmed never wanted to leave his home in the Yarmouk camp, and never wanted to leave Syria, but they left when the losses became more than he could bear. Abeer was arrested in Bangkok with their two smallest children, aged 2 and 6, for having an invalid visa, and lived in an overcrowded detainment centre for 8 months.

Nasir, a man in his 50s, travelled to Bangkok after receiving news that his wife and two teenaged sons had been arrested. He lived isolated in the room from which his wife and sons were taken. Each day he visited them in the detainment centre, traveling for an hour or more across town, working ceaselessly for their release for almost 9 months.

Hayder rushed from Lebanon to Bangkok after his sister, her husband, and their two children aged 18 months and 3 years old were arrested at the airport in Bangkok. Hayder was afraid of the Palestinian-Syrian community after he was deceived, and lost his family's savings. He lived in isolation and only left his flat to visit his sister in the detainment centre.

> …we seem to need a kind of rich and complex description of what people are able to do and to be – a description that may be more readily available to the reader of Dickens's novel than to those who confine their reading to the narrowly technical and financial documents…
>
> - Nussbaum and Sen, 1993: 1

Chapter 1 Introduction

"I am sorry, I thought you said Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok…"

1.1. Introduction

The word 'refugee,' more often than not, conjures up notions of poor, destitute, malnourished children, standing shoeless in refugee camps throughout Africa. When explaining to people that I was working with refugees in Bangkok, the most common and immediate response, from international development workers to Thai nationals, was, "I didn't even know refugees lived in Bangkok?" When I went on to inform them that I was working with Palestinian-Syrian refugees, the responses often varied between incredulity to something bordering on shock. Some went as far as to ask me if I was certain; perhaps I had meant something else, "Surely, there are no Syrians in Bangkok."

Indeed, many hundreds of Palestinian-Syrians, in addition to many hundreds of Syrian nationals, drove across the border into Lebanon, boarded airplanes in Beirut and flew to Bangkok in order to flee conflict and seek asylum. An increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers are escaping conflict and persecution from numerous African, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries in order to find refuge, ultimately pursuing third country resettlement in Southeast Asia. With the continued instability in many countries in these regions, this trend is not only likely to continue, but to intensify.

Facing a lack of legal protections upon arrival in most Southeast Asian cities, refugees from all nations are forced to live in extremely insecure and tenuous circumstances. In Bangkok, refugees and asylum seekers are in constant fear of indefinite detainment, extortion, and harassment. They lack the right to work, rent housing, obtain an education, and in many cases are unable to access proper health care.

With over 50 per cent of the world's displaced persons now living in urban areas, the current attitudes and policies towards refugees must certainly shift to adequately address the situation. However, our depth of knowledge about these urban populations is still superficial. While the field of urban refugee research is now growing, data and information is incomplete. In order to survive, refugees are forced to live a life hidden in plain sight; due to this, it is impossible to

begin to understand the scale of the issue, let alone the vast array of experiences of those seeking refuge in urban spaces. In Bangkok, how individuals are able to survive, sustain a livelihood and cope is unknown to most researchers, international and national non-governmental organisations (INGOs and NGOs), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

It is this gap in knowledge that has driven this research. I lived for two years in Bangkok volunteering my nights and evenings with a small NGO that works with refugees in the city. I was also an employee of a UN agency and worked in the United Nations compound where I regularly interacted with employees of UNHCR. Through these experiences I came to discover this gaping hole in knowledge, which was worsened by the 'arm's length' culture of the UNHCR, NGOs, and INGOs in Bangkok. Overall, these organisations did not understand how peopled managed to survive without the right to work, the right to stay, or the right to access resources such as health and education. More importantly, there was a lack of understanding regarding how they managed to build up the strength to survive under such conditions.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to my research and provide clarifications and insight into this global phenomenon. This chapter begins by describing the rationale for the research, the research questions, and the main findings. Second, the chapter briefly describes the current global refugee phenomena; relevant refugee law – focusing mostly on refugee status determination; trends in Asia, Southeast Asia, and Thailand; and finishes by describing the pull factors of, or draw to, Southeast Asia and the push, or discouraging, factors of Syria's neighbouring countries.

1.1.1 Wellbeing and Development

While working as an economist and statistician, attempting to understand the lives of the poor and vulnerable through varying demographic and social statistics, I was struck by the fact that statistics, figures, and indexes, while useful in their own right, would often provide no insight into the true motivations behind the decisions and trade-offs people make when facing constrained resource settings. In fact, these numbers often lead to further confusion, as statistics take spurious variables for granted and overlook motivating factors such as human values and subjective wellbeing. As an economist, the approach of examining individuals as rational actors attempting to maximise "utility", was uncomfortable, at best.

Humans are not solely motivated by economic factors, but are motivated by the desire to live well, to live a life consistent with their values. If development will have an impact on the overall wellbeing of individuals, we must begin to understand the varying and vast array of values,

aspirations, and motivations of the individuals we seek to assist. In order to do so we need to start looking beyond survival and livelihoods and start looking at and understanding the complex variables that influence human life.

1.1.2. Why Wellbeing and Refugees

Since the inception of this research endeavour, I have been surprised to encounter some resistance to the application of the wellbeing framework to that of refugees: *Why refugees and wellbeing?,* fellows, researchers, and humanitarian workers would ask, as if to say, *what right do refugees have to ask for a life worth living?* Humanitarian assistance organisations, from the UN agencies to INGOs have been advocating a 'rights-based' approach to address refugee situations for nearly two decades. However, I submit that the endeavour to protect the rights of and to merely provide basic needs for refugees is neither sufficient to combat major global development issues nor just to those facing displacement.

The most up to date statistic available (UNHCR, 2004) suggests that the average refugee situation will last approximately 17 years. During this 17 years, refugees will endure prolonged restrictions of basic rights and needs which can lead to a host of psychological issues, an atrophy of skills, low education attainment, the development of severe health issues from limited health treatment, an increased risk of violence, and a number of other impediments to development. More simply stated, prolonged refugee situations can contribute to global development issues and serve as an impediment to larger development goals. For this reason, humanitarian assistance organisations would better serve forced migrant and displaced populations through a wellbeing based approach. Recognising the values, needs, aspirations, and capabilities of displaced populations would allow service providers and humanitarian workers to combat the long term issues associated with forced displacement, including prolonged or re-emerging conflict and violence.

1.1.3. Why Thailand

The growing trend of seeking asylum outside of regions of origin will continue to grow with increasing conflict, urbanisation, and globalisation. The trends, context, and experiences of asylum seekers and refugees must be understood in order to appropriately respond.

Thailand makes for a dynamic, yet difficult case study. Thailand's history of treatment of refugees has been an unfavourable one. Nationalism and extreme ethnocentrism has led to a long history of insular policies aimed at excluding migrants of all origins. The country continues to commit innumerable human rights abuses and has remained unrelenting and unchanged in its policies, or lack thereof, even amongst mounting bilateral and multilateral pressure. Thailand

has strategically placed itself in a position of authority above the international refugee regime by figuratively holding a gun to the head of refugees; one false move from the international community, and Thailand will pull the trigger (more in Chapter 5).

While the lack of refugee legislation and protection is overwhelmingly the norm across Southeast Asia, the context and background of each country must be understood separately. This norm of 'Asian exclusion' has been researched, and several theories exist in an attempt to explain this void in legislation (Davies, 2006). However, the national historical, cultural and political contexts of each individual country must be considered before generalisations of the region can be made, although this area seems relatively unexplored. This research specifically and critically examines and analyses the context of Thailand.

1.1.4. The Questions

The global increase in the number and proportion of urban refugees generates a number of important questions, the first being, especially given the urban context, *how does a person, or a community of people, survive under such constrained circumstances?* However, as stated above, individuals are not only motivated to survive to increase assets; humans are motivated to achieve and maintain wellbeing and to live a life deemed worthy. Without understanding the values of individuals, the cultural context, and their definition of wellbeing, their livelihoods decisions can only be seen as arbitrary. In order to fully understand how individuals navigate the constrained situation in which they find themselves we have to closely examine the actions and decisions, seeing them as holistic and mutually reinforcing. This is what I term *wellbeing strategies* - combined survival, livelihood and coping strategies, where subjective wellbeing is seen in a context that is culturally and socially relevant. Strategies cannot be seen as distinct, but must be viewed as interrelated.

This research attempts to explore and gain an understanding of the situation of the urban refugees within this framework, and answers the question: *How do refugees in Bangkok, Thailand attempt to achieve and maintain wellbeing?*

1.1.5. Searching for Answers

In order to answer the above research question, I spent 14 months, from July 2013 to September 2014 collecting data in Bangkok, Thailand. I worked closely with both NGOs and a small number of Palestinian-Syrian families and individuals[1] collecting detailed case studies, attempting to

[1] For more information on participants, please see the methodology section, the actual number is difficult to specify as some of the community shared familial relations on some level, presenting an issue with categorically separating each family.

truly understand the process and outcome of wellbeing, seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What does this particular group of people value, and how do these values factor into their refugee experience?
2. What is the context in Thailand, how does the context create opportunities and impediments, and how are they manifested in the lives of individuals?
3. Which strategies do households and individuals (men, women and children) engage in order to survive and be well? What values matter in directing the trade-offs that people make?

1.1.6. Overall Findings

In order to answer the above research question, research was designed to analyse three main areas: *subjective* w*ellbeing and values* (Chapter 4), t*he structural and institutional* (Chapter 5)*,* and *livelihood and coping strategies* (Chapter 6).

Main findings from this research show that social and individual values and aspirations influence decision making even in times of crises. Individuals do take time to consider their options, even if all outcomes are likely to be unfavourable. Findings also show that domains of wellbeing can be defined by categorising multiple values. Domains are useful in that they provide a holistic picture of what the actualisation of values looks like and allows us to easily pinpoint what resources are needed to achieve wellbeing in each domain. Overall, domains are interconnected and value dependent, meaning that the domains cannot be seen as separate to values or the resources required to achieve wellbeing in each domain.

The institutional context in which refugees in Bangkok were forced to negotiate is highly restricted. Thailand enforces policies and practices in order to deter refugees from seeking asylum in Bangkok. These policies of deterrence limited refugees from accessing basic needs and left refugees constantly living in fear for their safety. Humanitarian organisations, or those which purport to provide services for refugees, were also extremely constrained by the Thai government and failed to provide basic assistance to refugees. In addition, evidence from this research suggests that the internal policies and practices of these service providers actually served to worsen the situation for refugees in Bangkok. Their actions and behaviour left refugees feeling unsupported and poorly treated, resulting in deep feelings of despair and hopelessness, worsening their chances at achieving wellbeing.

Findings from this research have shown how wellbeing strategies are adjusted when expectations are not met or strategies fail. Essentially, when strategies were met with overwhelming challenges and resulted in wellbeing failures, people were forced to adapt and adjust expectations, making trade-offs, and employing new coping strategies. People would then employ new strategies based on these adjustments. Over time, due to these adjustments and trade-offs, their overall wellbeing diminished. Simply stated, the more trade-offs the Palestinian-Syrian community in Bangkok made overtime, the worse off they were.

In order to sustain a livelihood and achieve wellbeing within the constrained situation, refugees engaged in strategies which included accessing communities and networks, selling assets, familial remittances, engaging in various forms of labour, deceptive practices, and engaging in illicit activities. Community cohesion and cooperation resulted in more positive livelihoods strategies, demonstrated an already established link between social networks and employment (Bloch and McKay, 2015; Castilla, 2013; Obukhova 2012; Obukhova and Lan, 2013; Yakubovich, 2005). However, this cohesion was undermined by the lack of transparency and support, leading to the utilisation of other detrimental coping strategies.

Overall, this research answers not only how refugees attempted to navigate constraints in order to live well, it also reveals why Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok could not be well. The constraints were too extreme, and the coping mechanisms were insufficient. For example, to live well, most required a sense of community and belonging, but they lacked the resources necessary to build trust in their community. As a result, many lived in isolation in order to cope, worsening their overall wellbeing. These trade-offs were detrimental and ultimately resulted in wellbeing failures.

1.2. Background: Changing refugee dynamics: Globally, Regionally, and Locally

1.2.1. Global Perspectives, Trends, and International Law

Globalisation and Urbanisation

UNHCR estimates the world's refugee population at 19.5 million[2], with only one third residing in refugee camps (UNHCR, 2016a). As of 2008, more than 50 per cent of the world's refugee population were found to be seeking asylum in urban centres (Crisp and Refstie, 2011; UNHCR, 2010; UNHCR, 2012; UNHCR, 2014). Eight years later, at the time of writing, according to UNHCR, trends have continued toward an urban bias and more than 60 per cent of the world's refugee

[2] This number does not currently account for the internally displaced, who comprise potentially 34 million people; asylum seekers, roughly 1 million; and stateless people who comprise at least 10 million (UNHCR, 2016a).

population and 80 per cent of internally displaced persons now reside in urban areas (UNHRC, 2016a). With a projected 19.5 million refugees in total, nearly 12 million refugees can be found in cities throughout the world (UNHCR, 2016a).

Including the aforementioned figure, current statistics and projections of refugee populations and demographics are unreliable, and often conflicting. Due to this, it is difficult to create a realistic picture of the world's urban refugee population, especially those who reside in developing countries. As of the end of 2013, 86 per cent of the world's refugees were hosted by developing countries, this number is up 16 per cent since 2003 (UNHCR, 2014). Considering this information, we can extrapolate that of the 16.8 million refugees residing in developing countries, up to 15 million may be residing in cities.

One could hypothesise that continued urban growth and urbanisation would consequently lead to an increased number of refugees in urban areas. However, some alternate or additional factors may contribute to the increase in urban refugee cases. Kobia and Cranfield (2009) in their review of urban refugee literature suggest that more information is needed, but some studies do show that an urban origin may determine urban migration. Individuals from an urban origin may be actively seeking urban spaces in order to apply their relevant skills and education. Therefore, as conflict becomes more prevalent in more urbanised locations, such as the Middle East, more displaced persons may be inclined to seek asylum in urban areas.

It is also likely that the country of asylum will dictate migration patterns, regardless of desired or intended location. For example, the current Vietnamese Hmong refugees in Thailand, traditionally rural dwellers, live mostly in Bangkok. After fleeing Vietnam mid to late last decade, many tried to find space in rural Lao and rural Northern Thailand. The Laotian government was "considerably less hospitable than the Vietnamese[3]" and the Hmong moved onward to Bangkok. Those who attempted to settle and farm in Northern Thailand found it impossible without contacts and were forced to relocate to Bangkok. Ultimately, the choice to live in camps, rural areas, or urban areas may not exist for those fleeing from violence and persecution.

It is also the case that individuals who originally fled to camps may be inclined to migrate to cities in order to earn income and send remittances home. Many also leave to avoid the hardships of the refugee camp (Kobia and Cranfield, 2009). Cooper (1993, cited in Marfleet, 2007) is one of the first authors to point out that refugees are drawn to urban areas for access to international NGOs and to Western resettlement programmes. Increased migration flows to

[3] Director, In Search of Sanuk/Courageous Kitchen, Phone Interview 16/10/2012

urban areas may also be attributed to UNHCR's shifting policies and assistance towards those living in urban areas. Shifts in policy are noticeably different between the 1997 *Policy and Practice Regarding Urban Refugees* and the UNHCR's 2009 *Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas.* The 1997 policy document cautions UNHCR staff to regard asylum seekers with suspicion; they should be seen as opportunistic individuals seeking third country resettlement through fraudulent claims. The general tone of the document put forth the idea that if refugees do indeed have a legitimate claim, they would not be able to reach or survive in an urban environment (HRW, 2002; Marfleet, 2007). The original 1997 document was heavily criticised and the latest 2009 policy document demonstrates an increased willingness to offer protection and offer solutions to those in urban centres.

Evidence from my research, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, suggests that individuals are drawn to urban centres such as Bangkok for a combination of factors. Ultimately, in today's globalised world, an urban dweller, with minimal resources can readily board a plane in order to find safety and claim asylum in a city outside of their country of origin. Given the choice between an urban centre and a refugee camp where conditions are considered abominable, individuals will be inclined to travel to urban areas if feasible, especially if they have experience in urban settings. A refugee camp will hardly be considered when there is an alternate option available. For many, it may not even seem like a choice, but a given solution to a major issue.

International Law and Definition Issues – who is a refugee?

The issue of forced migration is extremely complex and highly political on various levels. Labelling someone a refugee can be a sensitive issue depending on the country of origin and the refugee receiving country. There are numerous definitions and categories for those who are displaced. I will briefly summarise these and attempt to simplify these definitions for the purposes of this research as they pertain to the Thailand context. These concepts may not be relevant to all individuals, in all contexts, in all countries.

Forced migrant: A forced migrant is considered a person who involuntarily leaves his or her home or home region due to factors outside of his or her control. The issue of forced migration is extremely complex as the lines between forced and voluntary can become blurred. Any number of factors can contribute to an individual's migration strategy, such as politics, perceived violence, and human rights violations (Zetter, 2012). Global, regional, and local issues such as climate change, conflict, and persecution are often considered factors for forced, as opposed to voluntary, migration. The lines especially become blurred when considering the political agenda of the relevant country or the aid agency. For example, if Country X has weak or unstable ties

with Country Y, by recognising refugees from Country X, Country Y might be seen as placing blame or becoming involved with the domestic issues of Country X (Davies, 2006). This situation may cause Country Y to mislabel the refugees as illegal migrants to avoid any political or economic issues.

Internally displaced person: The internally displaced are those who are uprooted from their homes, but remain within the borders of their country of nationality or origin.

Asylum Seeker: According to UNHCR's policies in Thailand, a person who is forcibly displaced is not yet an asylum seeker until they are registered by UNHCR. A person fills out the appropriate paperwork and will eventually be given asylum seeker status by the UNHCR, commonly referred to as having a 'black and white paper' by refugees. Until then, they are unregistered and are not counted by UNHCR. In Thailand they are often referred to as 'populations awaiting registration.'

Refugee: In Thailand, in order to graduate from asylum seeker to refugee, an individual must go through the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process. Becoming a refugee means that a person is recognised under the appropriate international conventions and protocols by a UNHCR official. This process will include an interview conducted by an RSD officer of UNHCR and often includes the submission of a written statement. Once the interview is conducted the employee reviews the case file using the UNHCR guidelines and determines if the individual is a refugee. If the person is not deemed a refugee, they are rejected and no longer considered an asylum seeker (although they do have the opportunity to appeal). If they are 'recognised,' they obtain refugee status, commonly referred to by refugees as having 'coloured paper.'

Refugee Status Determination (RSD): Determining whether or not an individual is a refugee is based upon whether or not a person satisfies certain criteria. To explain the process simply, for the sake of information needed for this research, the RSD officer must essentially determine if the individual "has a well-founded fear of being persecuted[4]" upon return to his or her country of origin or nationality (UNHCR, 2011b: 11).

Politics and Bias in RSD

As stated above, labelling someone a refugee can be a highly debatable and deeply political issue. Due to this, there are a number of refugees residing in urban areas that still have a

[4] The definition of a refugee in the 1951 Convention: "Well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it"

legitimate claim to asylum but are not counted by UNHCR; potentially as many as 30,000 in Bangkok alone as estimated by service providers. As a result, I will use UNHCR official numbers for general estimates of refugee populations, with the caveat that they are politically biased and under representative due to the above issues.

For the purposes of this research, anyone who claims to be forcibly displaced from his or her country of origin, will be labelled a refugee. I will refer to individuals as refugees irrelevant of their UNHCR status and even if rejected after RSD, unless such information is pertinent to the context. Further, as my background is not in international refugee law, I cannot judge the legitimacy of an individual's claim. I understand that this is an imperfect and highly contestable stance, but the most feasible for this research.

UNHCR and Durable Solutions

According to UNHCR there are three durable solutions for individuals who have been forcibly displaced from their country of nationality (UNHCR, 2003).

1) *Voluntary repatriation* occurs when an individual returns to their country of nationality or origin. Post conflict, when a country is deemed safe, refugees are encouraged to return to their country of origin. However, many countries remain unsafe or unliveable for years or decades and safety is often difficult to determine.
2) *Local integration* occurs when refugees remain and attempt to integrate into the country of asylum. This is only an option for countries which are willing or able to accept refugees and/or are signatories to the appropriate conventions and protocols.
3) *Resettlement* to a third country occurs only when the other two options are not viable. In this case, UNHCR will work with the governments of third countries to permanently relocate refugees.

1.2.2. Regional Legislation and Trends

Asian Rejection

The majority of states worldwide are signatories to one or both instruments of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as 'the CP'); there are currently 148 signatory and 46 non-signatory states (RCOA, 2012; UNHCR, 2011a). Table 1.1 below shows the breakdown of signatory and non-signatory states by region. The majority of Asian states are non-signatories, with 63 per cent, or 19 of the 30 as non-signatory states. Only the Middle East has a higher percentage at 77 per cent. However, with 41

per cent of all non-signatory states located in Asia, there is a clear trend of what Davies (2006) refers to as 'Asian rejection' of refugees.

Table 1.1 Signatory and Non Signatory States of the CP by Region

Region	Signatory States	Non-Signatory States	Total	Percentage of Non-Signatory States: Region	Percentage of Non-Signatory States: Total
Africa	49	4	53	8	9
Americas	30	5	35	14	11
Asia	**11**	**19**	**30**	**63**	**41**
Europe	47	2	49	4	4
Middle East	3	10	13	77	22
Pacific	8	6	14	43	13
Total	148	46	194	24	100

Source: RCOA (2012) & UNHCR (2011a)

Regionally, Asia has the second highest number of refugees, and has an estimated total of 10 million people living as either refugees or illegal/undocumented migrants. The lack of legislation therefore has great implications for the recognition of the rights of refugees worldwide (Davies, 2006).

Current Urban Refugee Situation in Southeast Asia

Currently, there are no official figures for the urban refugee situation in Southeast Asia[5]. Table 2.1 below is a construction of estimates based on data available from UNHCR. Based on statistics from 2014 and 2016, there are currently just over 270,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the ten member states of ASEAN, where roughly 170,000 are residing in urban areas. The three countries which host the majority of refugees are Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Malaysia and Indonesia's refugee population is 100 per cent classified as urban, or 'enjoying freedom of movement,' as there are no official refugee camps in either country (Morand et al., 2012). Malaysia currently hosts over 140,000 refugees, with an estimated 30 to 50 thousand awaiting registration. In Thailand there are roughly 103,000 refugees, most of which are from Myanmar residing in camps. Of the ten ASEAN countries listed above, only Cambodia and the Philippines are signatories of the CP, but host less than 400 refugees combined. The remaining eight countries are considered unwilling or unable to partake in the CP.

[5] UNHCR statistical database offers some insight into location but does not distinguish between urban and rural

Table 1.2 Refugee Situation in Southeast Asia – ASEAN Member States

ASEAN	Signatories of the CP	Refugees	Asylum Seekers	Estimated Urban Population*
Brunei		0	0	0
Cambodia	1992	68	12	80
Indonesia		6,269	7,560	13,829
Lao		0	0	0
Malaysia		91,940	49,510	141,450
Myanmar		0	0	0
Philippines	1981	182	79	261
Singapore		3	0	3
Thailand		103,000	11,800	13,800
Vietnam		0	0	0
Total		201,462	68,961	169,423

Data obtained from the 2014 and 2016 UNHCR regional operations profiles - South-East Asia
*This number includes both asylum seekers and refugees based on estimations from the UNHCR Planning Information

Thailand's estimated 13,800 urban refugees are comprised of individuals from at least 39 countries.[6] Indonesia and Malaysia host a similarly constructed population of refugees, although much larger in number. Urban refugees arrive from Southeast and East Asia, a majority who are from Cambodia, Vietnam, and China; South Asian nations such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India; and the Middle East and Africa, including those from Syria, Iran, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and elsewhere.

"There are no refugees in Thailand" – Becoming a Refugee in a Legal Void

> Once, when working for a UN agency in Bangkok in 2010, I sat with a long time expert in forced migration and refugee law. I was asking questions about refugees in Thailand and finally I asked about Thai refugee law. The regional expert burst into laughter, "Don't you know? There are no refugees in Thailand!" In my naivety and early days working with refugees, it had not occurred to me that the word refugee is avoided and does not occur in any form in any Thai policy or legislation.

Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention nor the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (CP). The CP sets out to define a refugee, refugee status, and outline a set of 'specific obligations which are crucial to achieving the goal of protection' (Goodwin-Gill, 2008: 4). One such obligation is 'treatment no different from that accorded to citizens', which includes, among

[6] Interview – JRS 20/08/2013

others, the right to employment; to practice religion; to receive an education, public relief, and social security; and the freedom of movement (Goodwin-Gill, 2008: 6).

Since Thailand is not a signatory of the CP, refugees are not able to locally integrate and must be resettled in a third country. The RSD and resettlement process can take anywhere from 1.5 years to 10 years or more, depending on the case, resulting in the vast majority of refugees living illegally in Thailand for the duration. With a lack of any formal legislation or any informal policy, refugees will be unable to work, rent homes, access an education, or access proper healthcare. This also means they are living in constant fear of indefinite detention, restricting their movement thus further hindering their ability to sustain a livelihood.

The Draw of S.E. Asia

As mentioned previously, the notion that refugees from the Middle East would choose Thailand and Southeast Asia to seek asylum can seem a bit far-fetched. However, there are clear factors that make Southeast Asia an attractive option, such as access to entry, access to urban areas, access to third country resettlement, and utilising the country as a stopping point en route. Countries which share borders with conflict countries may not be open or hospitable to forced migrants. In these cases, refugees must look to seek asylum in countries outside of their region that have more relaxed entry requirements. Southeast Asian countries tend to rely on tourism and have lenient entry policies, making entry a fairly straightforward. Second, neighbouring countries may restrict refugees from accessing cities, confining them to camps. As a result, some refugees may choose an alternate non-neighbouring country where they are able to reside in cities as opposed to refugee camps.

Third, countries that are not signatories to the CP create an inadvertent pull factor. For obvious reasons, many refugees desire to resettle in a Western, developed country as opposed to a developing country. As legal entry into developed countries is often difficult for nationals from developing countries, individuals can travel to a non-signatory country and know they cannot be integrated locally and will be resettled to a preferred location. This is the case for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Fourth, Southeast Asia may not always be the intended target for refugees. Some groups attempt to use these countries as a stopping point before moving on to their intended destinations, but are unsuccessful and forced to remain in the region. These are some of the main pull factors that have made Southeast Asia a destination for many refugees.

The Push from the Middle East: No Place for Palestinians

Palestinians born to registered refugees in Syria are considered stateless, and are essentially born with refugee status. However, the vast majority of Palestinian-Syrians are granted the same rights as Syrians, apart from one major consideration; Palestinian-Syrians are not citizens. There are two major consequences to this. First, they cannot vote. Second, they are not given Syrian passports, and instead are given Syrian travel documents (Hammoud, 2013). On both the cover and inside the first page of the travel document it states in Arabic, English, and French that the holders of these documents are refugees.

With the lack of an official passport travel is heavily restricted and made complicated, which has been exacerbated since the conflict. Since the conflict began, countries neighbouring Syria have all placed restrictions on the entry of Syrians, especially Palestinian-Syrians. In Lebanon, for example, according an Amnesty International report (2014), corroborated by interviews, Palestinian-Syrian refugees are restricted from residing in Lebanon outside of refugee camps, and can only enter if they can prove their departure within 24 hours of entering within the borders. Proof of departure consists of a flight ticket from the Beirut airport, a valid visa for the country of arrival, and written permission from the Syrian government to leave Syria. If they are able to produce these documents, they are given a 24-hour transit visa.

Jordan, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2014), in January 2013 made public its policy to exclude the entry of Palestinian-Syrians into its borders, a policy that was silently in practice since April 2012. According to the same report, Fayez Tarawneh, chief of Jordan's royal court and prime minister for 6 months in 2012, reported that the policy was purposefully implemented to keep hundreds of thousands of Palestinian-Syrians from resettling in Jordan. Tarawneh reported that such an influx would upset the ethnic balance and lead to conflict.

Turkey and Iraq, since the beginning of the conflict, have also closed multiple borders or limited the numbers of refugees who are able to cross (HRW, 2013). This has made entry difficult for Palestinian-Syrians and Syrians alike. With no place to go, and no border to cross, many Palestinian-Syrians, as well as Syrians, who have chosen to flee Syria would be forced to leave the region.

1.3. Importance of the Research

A large gap in knowledge exists regarding the displaced residing in urban areas of Thailand and Southeast Asia more widely. Over all, there is very little data available that accurately depicts and produces an understanding of the various livelihood strategies, the quality of life, and overall wellbeing of the urban forcibly displaced. While an increasing amount of research is

being conducted on urban refugees, overall there is still a lack of data concerning a broad number of important issues, which are required for proper planning and action (Kobia and Cranfield, 2009; Morand, 2012). This research takes a step toward bridging that gap by building an understanding of these strategies and issues.

Refugees living in urban settings are 'usually dispersed, unenumerated, and unmanaged' (Marfleet, 2007: 24), therefore are often seen as 'populations that need to be managed…', or even helpless victims (Sanyal, 2012: 640). Although a prolonged humanitarian issue, service providers tend to treat the situation as an emergency, and 'a development approach to has been seen as a waste of time' (Boas et al., 2006: 71). Boas et al. (2006) point out that humanitarian situations are in reality ongoing, and the effects spread across borders. Therefore, interventions should be designed keeping in mind the long term and far reaching implications of the situation. The refugee situation in Bangkok, for example, is neither an isolated nor a short lived phenomenon, but a growing one with long term implications. This research is important as it examines and analyses the short-term approach of service provision and its implication on the wellbeing of refugees.

From my arrival in Bangkok in July 2013 to my departure in September 2014, the official numbers of refugees in Bangkok grew by 300 per cent; unofficial numbers proved a more substantial increase. At the same time, UNHCR Thailand did not see an increase in funding[7]. As such, UNHCR as well as local and international nongovernmental organisations are and will be facing increased challenges to the provision of education, health care, and basic services. This is an especially difficult task in developing countries, which can struggle to provide basic services for the general population.

Findings from this research show that a change from a human rights approach to a wellbeing approach would not only lead to improved wellbeing, but would be more cost effective for the aid community. NGOs and international organisations will have to be equipped with data and best practices to provide effective service delivery. They must bear in mind the major challenges and impediments to livelihood and wellbeing, while simultaneously developing cost effective, empowering, and development focused solutions. These solutions should take advantage of the pre-existing skills of refugees instead of restricting them by treating them as helpless victims. In order to implement effective policies and practices, knowledge must be generated regarding the needs of individuals, families and communities in urban settings, including how needs are met, how individuals cope, and the resulting wellbeing outcomes. This information is essential

[7] Notes BASRAN meeting 20/08/2013

to implement efficient policies which could function alongside pre-existing networks, social resources, and social capital.

Furthermore, refugees are being drawn from countries all over the world to Thailand and Southeast Asia making this a global humanitarian issue. In order for the treatment of forced migrants to improve, Thailand and the remaining ASEAN countries must begin to change their outdated policies, requiring effective global pressure. While there are many similarities in the region, the context and justification for their exclusionary policies will vary. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the cultural and political impediments of each nation is necessary. My research seeks to bring to light these impediments, focusing solely on the situation in Thailand.

Moreover, this research adds to the literature by providing an in-depth description of the lives of refugees from the perspective of the refugee, exploring and analysing their strategies for survival. This research analyses the negotiation strategies that refugees engage when resources are lacking, creating an understanding of both strategies and assets. Using this perspective, negotiating includes not only managing material resources, but adapting and making trade-offs in order to cope mentally within the adverse context. This research analyses the life choices of individuals using a holistic approach to understand the interplay between context, values, and strategies.

Finally, this research is important as it provides an original contribution to the broader research; it goes beyond a rights based approach and applies a wellbeing approach to the field of forced migration, and can be applied to other groups of forced migrants. According to Copestake (2008: 578), 'top-down thinking about wellbeing' is not informed by empirical research on wellbeing to the extent it should be. Overall, it is my hope that this research will add to the growing body of wellbeing literature in order to be used to influence this top down thinking, and applying wellbeing in response to prolonged humanitarian issues.

1.4. Chapter Overview

This thesis contains seven chapters and is organised by three sections:

Section 1 – Introduction, Rationale and Set-up

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to introduce and explain the relevance of this research and its findings. The chapter explains the importance of and provides background on the topic. A number of definitions regarding international refugee law are provided alongside a description of the changing global refugee dynamics and the refugee situation in the ASEAN region and

Thailand. The chapter concludes by explaining the importance of this research in both academia and refugee policy.

Chapter 2 – Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conceptual framework in which to organise the research analysis and findings. The conceptual framework is built upon the three areas described above: wellbeing and values, the structural and institutional, and strategies. Wellbeing, as a concept, is explored in-depth, examining the varying ways in which the concept is used in both the fields of development and psychology and links them. Lastly, the idea of 'wellbeing strategies' is presented, merging the conceptual areas, asserting that decisions, motivations, and behaviour are driven by context, survival, and the desire to live well.

Chapter 3 - Research Methods, Methodology, and Ethics

This chapter first describes the methodology of my research, examining ontology and epistemology and approaches to data collection and analysis. Second, the chapter outlines my research methods for data collection and methods for analysis. It also describes my selection of research participants, explaining why Palestinian-Syrian refugees were a relevant and feasible group in which to study. Third, the chapter describes the major issues and considerations when conducting research with urban refugees, including ethical considerations and my positionality and biases. This is an extremely important section as it critically examines past refugee research and makes the case for a shift in how researchers engage with refugee populations.

Section 2 – Analysis

Chapter 4 – Understanding Wellbeing: Palestinian-Syrian Refugees

The first empirical chapter will build an in-depth understanding of the meaning of wellbeing for the Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok, examining the three aspects of wellbeing (subjective, objective, and relational). It is important to include this analysis early on so that the reader can understand the experience of the refugee families: How did they define a full and meaningful life? What were their values, priorities, and aspirations? How did Palestinian-Syrians view themselves? How were their aspirations and views reflected in their actions and the trade-offs made (leaving Syria, trying to survive in Thailand)? This chapter will also analyse the difficulties refugees faced during the 'refugee experience,' answering the questions: What was their refugee experience? What obstacles did they face? What did they need to adapt to?

Further, this chapter will also help the reader to understand the importance of values in the preceding chapters. For example, this chapter will help show why institutional constraints mattered so much for wellbeing outcomes (for example, education is a very important value for Palestinians, but they were unable to access it). Essentially we cannot understand how institutions constrain or impede wellbeing if we do not understand what individuals need to be well. The chapter will also help make clear in later chapters the importance of the decisions and trade-offs that were made.

Chapter 5 – Institutions, Structures, and Wellbeing

The purpose of the chapter is to build an understanding of the context in which refugees in Thailand live and the overarching effects on their wellbeing (both the process and the outcome). Thai law, paired with societal views of outsiders, result in an adverse environment in Bangkok, directly impeding the ability of refugees to meet their basic needs. At the same time, these laws also have a direct effect on the UNHCR and relevant NGOs (the local service providers) and limit their ability to deliver services. These limits, in turn, place economic and psychological strain on service providers, which has implications, both direct and indirect, on the refugee community and their own ability to meet their needs. Two major findings emerge in this chapter. First, the refugee community was forced to turn to informal networks to meet their basic needs due to the institutional failures. Second, institutional failures lead to wellbeing failures as the actions of service providers contributed to feelings of insecurity.

Chapter 6 –Strategies, Trade-offs, and the Community

Viewing wellbeing as both a process and an outcome, this chapter will examine and analyse how individuals navigated the constrained circumstances in which they found themselves in order to attempt to achieve wellbeing. Considering the constraints from the chapter above, we can begin to understand why refugees make certain choices even though they may seem irrational or self-defeating (or even lazy and thoughtless according to some service providers). This chapter will also analyse the strategies in which individuals engaged and the role and the impact on wellbeing as both a process and an outcome.

Overall, the constrained circumstances lead to negative outcomes: depression, isolation, doubt, and others. In response, refugees employed a number of coping mechanisms to try and alleviate these negative outcomes. However, while some were positive, most coping mechanisms were negative and leave refugees worse off. Even when coping mechanisms are positive, they do not serve to improve the situation. This chapter not only provides a description of wellbeing failures, but also analyses the perpetual failings and explains why refugees are in a cycle of constant

failure. Overall, this chapter provides an understanding of the interplay between wellbeing as a process and an outcome.

Section 3 – Conclusions and Reflections

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of findings from each chapter and synthesises the findings and conclusions. Overall, the chapter provides an overview of how Palestinian-Syrian refugees demonstrated the interplay between the subjective, relational, and the material in the application of the wellbeing framework. More simply, this chapter shows how the wellbeing framework can be applied to the real life strategies of those in the most difficult of situations. Further strengthening the argument for the need of a better framework to understand human behaviour in the face of adversity. The chapter finishes by providing a list of implications for policy and practice and further research.

Chapter 2 Conceptual Framework

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to specify the conceptual framework which was used to inform the research design and analysis of this thesis. This chapter does so by thoroughly examining concepts important to the research. This chapter concludes by constructing the framework in which to view and understand the interrelatedness of these concepts thus providing the structure for the thesis. Concepts are organised into three areas of focus:

1. *Wellbeing - Personal beliefs, values and objective/subjective/relational wellbeing*: what people value; how they cope; and how their beliefs and values impact their wellbeing processes and outcomes
2. *The structural and institutional*: the relevant structures and institutions, the ensuing policies and practices, the subsequent opportunities and impediments to the access of resources, and resulting wellbeing
3. *Strategies to access and utilise resources*: strategies that individuals engage in order to access resources under constrained conditions; the networks and social groups utilised; and the trade-offs and adjustments made when strategies fail

Overall, these three areas of focus are used to organise the findings of this research and build a holistic understanding of the wellbeing strategies of refugees, demonstrating the relationships among structure, agency, and the wellbeing outcomes of Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok, Thailand.

Refugees are commonly viewed as helpless victims and their agency to act is often overlooked (Harrell-Bond, 2002; Korac, 2009; Lamba and Krahn, 2003; Morrice, 2011; Sanyal, 2012). However, the resilience and resourcefulness of refugees are easily evidenced by the complex coping mechanisms and survival strategies they regularly employ. Refugees in urban areas often face a different set of constraints compared to those living in camps. Refugees may seek asylum in urban areas due to the opportunities available, but find that cities can be a place of great exclusion where access to resources is extremely limited. Those seeking asylum in urban areas in countries that are non-signatories to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol are residing in a legal limbo, which 'demands resourcefulness on their part, whilst creating problems for those willing and able to help' (Hoffstaedter, 2015: 2). Refugees often live scattered throughout urban areas, unlike camp refugees, making service provision extremely problematic. As a result, survival becomes difficult and refugees become dependent on their own resilience and resourcefulness for survival (Grabska, 2006; Hoffstaedter, 2015; Palmgren, 2013).

The strategies in which refugees engage, much like those of the urban poor, are wide ranging and can include engagement in social networks, diversification of income, entrepreneurial activities, and negotiations for resources (Farrington et al., 2002; Grabska, 2006; Hoffstaedter, 2015; Hossain, 2005; Korac, 2009; Moser, 1998; Palmgren, 2013; Perlman, 1976; Roberts, 1995; Sommers, 2001). For urban refugees, these strategies are very often employed within a heavily constrained context due to a lack of freedoms, opportunities, and resources available. Therefore, decisions will entail a number of trade-offs and will not only depend on local and global markets, structural inequalities, and the situational context, but will also vary based on the values and aspirations which individuals and households maintain. As a result, as with any group, strategies will vary across households, as individuals adjust and adapt in an attempt to achieve and maintain, not only a livelihood, but also a life they see as worth living (Coulthard et al., 2011; Cummins and Wooden, 2014; Graham and Oswald, 2010; McGregor, 2009).

2.2. Wellbeing

2.2.1. Wellbeing in Development

The concept of human wellbeing is not new in the field of development. If defined broadly enough, it can be argued that wellbeing has always been a part of the international development agenda (Copestake, 2008). According to McGillivray and Clarke (2006), wellbeing, as used in the development context, is a multidimensional concept that incorporates the ideas of capabilities and human needs to determine the degree of an individual's welfare. This definition can be traced back to the work of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. The contributions of both have helped lead to a shift in thinking that has allowed for the incorporation of measures beyond income to analyse and understand the experience of poverty.

According to Sen (1993), the wellbeing, or the quality of a life, of the citizens of a country is a more accurate measure of a country's level of development than aggregate or per capita income. A person's wellbeing is characterised by their functionings, which are/can be considered anything from good health to the experience of happiness. The various combinations of valued functionings that people are able to achieve are the person's capability (Sen, 1992). Therefore, poverty is far more than a lack of income, but a lack of valued functionings to achieve capabilities. Sen, among others, has argued that individual choice and the ability to lead the life of one's choosing are more important measures for development than income or expenditure (Sen, 2009, Sen, 1999).

Nussbaum throughout the last two decades has contributed to the expansion of development thinking with her reflections on human dignity, values, equality, and liberty. Nussbaum asserts

that using income as a measure for development 'tries to weasel out of making any cross-cultural claims about what has value;' she also points out, alternatively, that using income as a measure 'does assume the universal value of opulence' (Nussbaum 2002: 126). Development success, instead, should be demonstrated in what a person is 'able to be and do' and not their level of satisfaction alone (Nussbaum, 2000: 222; Nussbaum, 2002: 123). The social and political contexts are highly relevant as they provide the foundation for equity which allows individuals the rights and opportunity to be able to live a valued life (Nussbaum, 2002).

In recent years, an increasingly holistic view of wellbeing has become central in both national policies and the international development agenda (Pouw and McGregor, 2014; Taylor, 2011). Most notably, the 2008 economic crisis helped bring attention to the volatile nature of growth focused development. Due to this, an ever increasing number of economists, politicians and academics have further argued the need to look beyond traditional neoliberal economic indicators to assess 'societal progress' (Pouw and McGregor, 2014: 6; Stiglitz et al., 2009; Taylor, 2011). The Sarkozy Commission Report (Stiglitz et al., 2009), for example, points out that the statistics and indicators used to assess the condition of the economy often lead to false assumptions about the quality of life. As a result, international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank have implemented initiatives to incorporate wellbeing frameworks to measure and assess current conditions with the aim of implementing better social policies.

2.2.2. Psychological and Social Wellbeing

According to Ryan and Deci (2001), psychological wellbeing can be defined by two approaches, hedonism and eudaimonism. Traditionally, the hedonic paradigm equates wellbeing with pleasure and happiness, using subjective wellbeing as a measure. In this sense, subjective wellbeing is defined as 'life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood': essentially happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001: 144). Alternatively, the eudaimonic approach views wellbeing as distinct from happiness, some with the view that happiness, or momentary pleasure, can even be detrimental to overall wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Therefore, the eudaimonic paradigm includes both subjective and objective wellbeing; for example, a well-balanced diet and exercise might not maximise the experience of pleasure, but will contribute to an overall sense of health. The opposite, a poor diet and limited exercise might increase pleasure but could lead to decreased mobility or health issues, diminishing an overall sense of wellness. The eudaimonic approach is holistic and takes into consideration human values and needs which will be culturally and contextually dependent (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Overall, a eudaimonic approach not only allows the question, *how are you?* but also, *what do you need to flourish?*

This research uses a multidimensional framework in which to view wellbeing which is strongly imbued with the notions of the eudaimonic, drawing from the Wellbeing in Development Countries framework from the University of Bath, where wellbeing is seen as:

> A state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life (WeD, 2007).

By using this definition, wellbeing can be viewed as holistic in nature, both an outcome and a process. As a process wellbeing is the predominant human telos and the main driver of decision-making. Wellbeing can also be viewed as three dimensional incorporating the objective, the subjective, and the relational. Overall, humans are actively seeking to live within a system of values, with others, to attain what they see as necessary to live well.

As a Process and Outcome

Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* posited that achieving eudaimonic wellbeing is the highest aim of human life and it is in our nature to attempt to achieve it. In this sense, wellbeing can be seen as a desired outcome, as well as a process in which we engage. Current psychological wellbeing research supports Aristotle's assertion. The theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis puts forth the idea that wellbeing, much like all systems in the human body, is homeostatic, where the body works to maintain constant conditions within an environment even in the face of external shocks and changes (Cummins et al., 2009).

Wellbeing is homeostatic in that 'a generalised sense of wellbeing is held positive with remarkable tenacity' (Cummins, et al., 2009: 26). Essentially, according to Cummins et al. (2009) wellbeing, generally and abstractly, is threatened by outside pressures and challenges, but is maintained by a number of external and internal coping mechanisms. The most influential external coping mechanisms include human relationships and money, for example. Internal coping mechanisms, on the other hand, are a combination of 'habituation and adaptation' (Cummins et al., 2009: 28). Adaptations include a number of coping mechanisms such as meaning making. In this sense, wellbeing is both a process and an outcome, where both mental and physical coping strategies are employed to maintain positive levels of wellbeing.

While it is possible to adjust expectations and adapt to circumstances, when overburdened with challenges, there is a point when adaptation becomes difficult, if not impossible. Essentially,

when faced with an overabundance of challenges, we are not able to live a life according to our values and we begin to suffer (Biswas-Diener and Diener, 2001). Cummins et al. (2009) have come to similar findings, asserting that extremely adverse living conditions can affect wellbeing homeostasis. Prolonged negative experiences will sustain low levels of subjective wellbeing. These periods of negative experiences will lead individuals to seek coping strategies in an attempt to actively control and maintain levels of subjective wellbeing (Cummins et al., 2009).

Theories of Coping

In an attempt to continually maintain positive levels of subjective wellbeing we must continually adapt and adjust to shocks and disturbances. Employing coping mechanisms allows us to react to stressors and adjust and adapt accordingly. The concept of coping, as viewed within the development context, has traditionally been limited, defined as the short term responses or changes employed when shocks are encountered in 'vulnerable livelihoods systems' (Davies, 1993: 60; Dercon, 2002; Scoones, 2009). In this sense, coping is seen as 'acting to survive' in the moment, and not as a safeguard against future risks, as opposed to adaptation, which incorporates permanent change (Davies, 1993: 60). In this light, coping is part of the overall resilience of a community and serves as a stop-gap for economic shocks, and includes strategies such as borrowing, selling assets, engaging in informal employment or self-employment, relying on social networks for informal exchanges, and many others (Leonard, 2000; Shaw et al., 2014; Sultana and Rayhan, 2012).

The above definition is narrow in scope and fails to acknowledge the psychological aspects of survival and adaptation, focusing entirely on the economic. As Ryan and Sapp (2007) point out, not only must physical needs be met, but a number of psychological needs must be met in order for a person to thrive. It is, therefore, impossible to separate human actions into categories, i.e. economically driven or psychologically driven. This requires that the definition be expanded so as to look beyond income generation as the sole motivation behind human action or reaction.

Psychological coping, according to Carver and Conner-Smith (2010: 685), is a broad concept, but can be loosely defined as 'the efforts to prevent or diminish, threat, harm and loss, or to reduce associated distress.' Individuals cope by dealing with emotions; directly tackling problems; disengaging and avoiding; adapting and scaling back goals; by creating meaning from difficult circumstances; or any combination thereof (Carver and Conner-Smith, 2010). Not all coping strategies can be seen as positive, in fact many negative strategies, such as drug use and the use of violence, are common. Coping can exist as both thought and action, and will often depend on

an individual's ability to hold on to hope. The aspect of hope is crucial in the coping process as hope sustains coping (Folkman, 2010).

Making meaning is a common and important coping mechanism for those who have suffered traumatic events (Davis et al., 1998). Making meaning can take various forms, however, two forms are most commonly cited and researched. The first is 'meaning-as-comprehensibility,' or making sense of the experience, to make it more understandable. This usually involves the active creation of a reason something has occurred: it is God's plan or 'people get what they deserve' (Davis et al., 1998; 562). The second, 'meaning-as-significance,' is the making meaning through perceiving growth or some benefit from the experience, or 'pursuit of the silver lining' (Davis et al., 1998: 561; Park et al., 2012). This means actively seeking to uncover the positive aspects of an event: placing increased value in relationships or seeing the experience as a learning experience. These feelings of gain help to restore 'purpose, value, and worth' (Davis et al., 1998: 562).

Wellbeing as a Strategy

In a practical sense, wellbeing, taking into consideration the above, can be viewed in light of the thoughts, behaviours, strategies, and relationships in which individuals engage (Coulthard et al., 2011; McGregor, 2007; Taylor, 2011). Wellbeing should also be seen as dynamic, occurring in various degrees, and 'continuously generated through conscious and sub-conscious participation in social, economic, political and cultural processes' (Coulthard et al., 2011, Gronseth, 2013; McGregor, 2007: 317). Seeing wellbeing as a process allows us to examine wellbeing as 'something that happens' and part of our 'self-management' as we aim to achieve and maintain wellbeing (White, 2015: 30).

As Three Dimensional: Objective, subjective, and relational

The multidimensional wellbeing approach views wellbeing as the socially and culturally constructed 'objective circumstances of the person and their subjective evaluation' of the circumstances in which they find themselves (Coulthard, et al., 2011; Gough, et al., 2007: 5). This definition allows wellbeing to be viewed as objective, subjective, and relational (Gough et al., 2007; Coulthard et al., 2011).

Objective

The objective aspect of wellbeing includes the attainment of the basic needs, or the normative aspects of a person's life (Gasper, 2007). Objective aspects can be seen as the foundations of

wellbeing, or the basic needs that need to be met. Essentially, a person who lacks food, shelter, and basic health cannot be seen as well. This reflects Sen's definition of poverty as a lack of capabilities, where measures such as income and educational attainment can be used as proxies to measure objective wellbeing.

Psychological needs are related to this aspect of the framework. Ryan and Sapp (2007) point out that basic biological needs are acknowledged as necessary to live well, while psychological needs are more controversial and difficult to establish. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) specifies that wellbeing is contingent upon autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ryan and Sapp (2007:75) assert that the lack of any of these three will lead to diminished 'growth, integrity, and wellness.' The relationship between material and psychological wellbeing will be examined in this research.

Subjective

Subjective wellbeing, on the other hand, examines the wellbeing of the individual as declared by the individual (Rojas, 2007). According to Rojas (2007) subjective wellbeing looks holistically at how the person is doing and not just at various aspects of the person's life. Using this framework, a person who is suffering from poor health and inadequate nutrition cannot be said to be experiencing wellbeing even if they experience periodic episodes of happiness or feel good about other aspects of life (Coulthard et al., 2011).

Subjective well-being, however, has been criticised for its simplicity and naivety (White and Ramirez, 2015), suggesting that individuals do not always know what they need to be well, therefore are unable to assess the importance of varying factors on their over-all wellbeing. However, this argument suggests that people have only a limited understanding of their values and what makes them feel well, which I submit is an extreme under-estimation of the natural intelligence of humanity. Second, in the words of Ryan and Sapp (2007: 75), 'the human psyche innately strives for these nutriments and gravitates to sources of their fulfilment.' We cannot always name exactly what we need when we need it, but we will strive to live a life that makes us feel well, even if we employ strategies that backfire in the end.

Relational

The relational aspect of wellbeing emphasises two important factors. The first is that subjective wellbeing is based on multiple identities and subjectivities, which are not fixed or complete, many of which are influenced by extrinsic factors and are relational (Coulthard, et al. 2011;

White and Ramirez, 2015). White and Ramirez (2015: 120) point out that individuals are both the 'subject of their lives' and 'subject to powers' outside of their choosing. Therefore, societal and cultural norms also determine what is important for overall wellbeing. This can also lead an individual to assess their level of wellbeing by measuring against what others have and what is perceived as valuable in society. These measurements also contribute to the construction, and resulting pursuit, of aspirations. Secondly, the relational aspects to wellbeing are based on our interactions and experiences with others. (White, 2009). Ryan and Deci (2000), applying SDT, describe psychological wellbeing as based upon relations with others. As such, personal wellbeing is also dependent on the wellbeing of the community.

2.2.3. Migration/Forced Migration and Wellbeing

Traditionally, multidimensional wellbeing frameworks have not been applied to research in the field of migration and refugee studies, especially when regarding the refugee experience of flight. Although this has begun to change within the last decade (e.g. Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013, Gronseth, 2013; Huovinen and Blackmore, 2015; IOM, 2013; Warfa et al., 2012; Wright, 2010, 2011, 2012), Wright justly points out,

> An important shortfall in the integrations literature is that it has placed less emphasis on migrants as social agents who are actively strategizing and involved in shaping their goals and meeting their needs (Wright, 2010; 368).

Due to this, the wellbeing approach is well placed to help fill this gap as it provides a holistic viewpoint in which to understand the experiences, motivations, needs, capabilities, and coping strategies of those who migrate (Wright, 2010). Wright (2010: 368) also points out the importance of examining 'barriers' to the wellbeing of migrants, looking holistically at their lives, based on their own 'multidimensional assessments'. Research by Wright (2010) and Huovinen and Blackmore (2015) similarly demonstrate how migration can make it difficult for families and individuals to live within their values system as they struggle to adapt to changing circumstances. The aspect of subjectivity is also important, as migration itself can influence and change what people need to be well. For example, migrants, over others, tend to place much emphasis on memories, meaning, and the ability to retain hope (Gronseth, 2013).

The application of the wellbeing framework could potentially be viewed as inappropriate in the field of forced migration and refugee studies, especially when researching the process of flight. The argument being: if migrants are 'forced' to relocate in the face of conflict and violence, how do factors such as values and capabilities matter? While conflict and crisis are commonly the predominant push factors, suggesting that forced migrants have no agency is problematic as it

overlooks other drivers of migration. While it is impossible to deny the importance of conflict, it is 'equally wrong to neglect the on-going, perhaps mundane social processes that drive mobility' (Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013: 4).

Bakewell and Bonfiglio (2013) have introduced a framework in which to analyse these underlying factors along three dimensions: aspirations, norms, and practices. This framework provides useful insight regarding both personal motivations as well as the structural factors that drive migration. While I found this framework to be a useful guide to examine strategies in the early stages of the refugee experience, I found it limiting when examining strategies in the 'settlement' phase, or while refugees were residing in Bangkok. Therefore, I chose to analyse determinates for migration, in the same manner in which I analysed all other wellbeing strategies: by understanding individual and societal values alongside capabilities.

Considering values is a useful way in which to understand wellbeing strategies. The term 'values' is abstract, used rather broadly across the social sciences (Featherstone, 2011; Fischer and Schwartz, 2011; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004; Rohan, 2000). However, in this research, I use the definition presented by Fischer and Schwartz (2011: 1128), where values are seen 'as abstract beliefs about desirable goals, ordered by relative importance, that guide individuals as they evaluate events, people, and actions.' Values are useful for understanding wellbeing strategies in all contexts as they can determine and are determined by our attitudes, personality, and behaviour (Fishcher and Schwarz, 2011) and create our aspirations and drive our associated decision making (Featherstone, 2011; Fischer and Schwartz, 2011; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004).

Values are dynamic and fluid, based on the context and situation of both the individual and society (Featherstone, 2011; Fischer and Schwartz, 2011; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004). Due to the fact that values are both societal and individual, and change over time, those within a similar group may have varying values (Fischer and Schwartz, 2011). Values are important because they help us to determine our responsibilities, position our thinking and logic, motivate our aspirations, and guide our actions (Featherstone, 2011; Fischer and Schwarz, 2011; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004; Rohan, 2000). Overall, values form from biological, psychological, and social needs and 'values serve as socially acceptable, culturally defined ways of articulating [those] needs' (Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004: 361; Rohan, 2000). The concept of values provides an overarching picture about what individuals and society deem as both necessary to be well and the appropriate ways in which to achieve wellbeing.

Building an understanding of values alongside capabilities allows us to analyse the options available to affected populations and the limitations and opportunities presented by structures. As stated above, capabilities are based on our valued functionings, and reflect the freedom we have *to do* or *be* what we value (Sen, 2009). In this sense, both personal attributes and structures matter. For example, the option to move on to a perceived better life is based on a combination of objective circumstances that are both personal and structural; these might include economic status, health, education, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. Analysing the role of values and capabilities allows us to understand the interplay between wellbeing strategies and structures.

2.3. Structural and Institutional

Structural and institutional factors, taken in consideration with individual and group capabilities and attributes, will create the context in which refugees find themselves and the constraints and opportunities they face. For example, a Congolese refugee in a Rwandan refugee camp will have a completely different experience as compared to an Iraqi refugee seeking asylum in Kuala Lumpur. Each group will face different constraints and challenges and will have different needs and priorities. The differences among these situations will depend upon both the attributes of the refugee population and the context in which the population resides, although some universal characteristics of the challenges may exist.

Analysing the relevant context allows us to understand the structural and institutional challenges that refugees face. This understanding can generate knowledge which allows for refugees to be seen as 'social actors': people attempting to navigate the environment, applying various methods and strategies in order to survive and overcome glaring obstacles (Korac, 2009: 10). Therefore, this research aims to closely analyse the lives of the individuals, families and the community, within the institutional context. This will be done by creating an understanding of the socio-political climate of Thailand and the role of international organisations.

2.3.1. Welfare and Social Policy Regimes

> Welfare: '*the material and social preconditions for well-being*'
>
> - (Weale, 1983, as cited in Pierson, 1998: 9)

This research analyses the institutional context within Bangkok using the social policy regime framework. The framework will assist in exploring and making sense of the complex relationships among Thai institutions, Thai policies, and non-state actors and their influence on the lives and strategies of refugees. The social policy regime is an expansion of the welfare state regime framework, which is essentially the paradigm which is used to examine how the roles of market, state, and family generate welfare outcomes (Gough, 2013: 206). The social policy

regime framework is a departure from the welfare state regime framework as it incorporates a broader view of Esping-Anderson's (1990) welfare triad: the state, market, and family. Instead, the social policy regime encompasses the entire *welfare mix*, or 'the entire set of institutional arrangements, policies and practices affecting welfare outcomes…' within a state (Gough, 2004b: 26).

Essentially, in developing countries, when the state fails to provide social protection, a wide range of actors will be accessed by individuals and families in order to cope and survive. These actors, which comprise the welfare mix, can include communities, religious organisations, civil society, NGOs, international organisations, and others (Davis, 2004). Livelihood and survival strategies are often complex in these settings and include both formal and non-formal strategies (Davis, 2004). Due to lack of power and options, individuals can rely on informal security, and seek inclusion through informal, potentially problematic manners (Gough, 2004b).

This expanded view is particularly useful to this research for three main reasons. First, it allows for the examination of the role of a large set of actors and their complex relationship in the provision of services and the subsequent wellbeing strategies in which families engage (Esping-Anderson, 1999; Gough, 1979; Gough, 2004b). Second, the framework provides a tool in which to examine the role of the state in perpetuating social exclusion (Gough, 2004b). Third, the focus of this framework is on the individual/household, focusing on "the factors that enable a person's agency" and the ability of the individual to negotiate within the complex institutional context to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes (Newton, 2007: 16).

Role of the State and Thailand's Institutional Conditions

The East Asian social policy regime can be classified as a productivist social policy regime, where social policy is a larger part of an economic development strategy (Goodman et al., 1998; Gough, 2004b; Kwon, 2005). The welfare systems in East Asia were initially geared toward industrialisation strategies (Haggard and Kauffman, 2008; Kwon, 2005; Ramesh and Asher, 2000; Walker and Wong, 2005). These strategies emphasise the development of human capital via health and education and are less likely to emphasise the importance of social security schemes aside from the provision of benefits for civil servants and the military (Gough, 2004b; Haggard and Kauffman, 2008; Ramesh and Asher, 2000). Informal workers, such as domestic servants and day labourers, receive little public support or income protection, and immigrants are almost entirely overlooked (Ramesh and Asher, 2000).

Motives for the productivist regime are also politically driven and have three political goals: nation-building, securing loyalty of the elite, and legitimising undemocratic regimes (Gough, 2004b). As a productivist state, the Thai government focuses its political goals on the above listed agenda: nation-building, bolstering the devotion to the royal family, and legitimising the anti-democracy military regime. The goal of nation-building is particularly relevant for this research as this aspect of the productivist agenda has led to the long term mistreatment of outsiders, including refugees and other forced migrants. Ultimately, nation-building in Thailand has succeeded in repressing ethnic minorities and migrants, by creating 'the informal notion' of Thai-ness (McCargo, 2011: 843). As a result, many groups which are not expressly seen as Thai are denied access to basic rights, often seen and treated as less than human.

2.3.2. Expanded Welfare Mix: Humanitarian Assistance and Service Providers

As the social policy regime framework posits, when the state fails or refuses to provide social protection, other actors such as religious organisations, civil society, local NGOs and international organisations will take on this role (Davis, 2004, Griffiths et al., 2005; Zetter, 1996). This research analyses the role of the above groups by applying two categories, formal service providers and informal service providers. Formal service providers include national and international groups who are nationally and/or internationally registered as humanitarian assistance organisations. These include UN agencies, INGOs, and NGOs. Informal service providers include religious organisations and civil society groups which act independently and are often unknown by the state.

Formal Service Providers

Formal service providers will be enabled or constrained by the institutions and structures of the countries in which they reside. Policies, politics, infrastructure, and culture will influence the effectiveness of service provision. At the same time, pre-existing internal culture and policies of the institutions will have an impact on service provision as well.

Research shows that humanitarian workers face a large number of negative outcomes including emotional exhaustion, stress disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse (Ager et al., 2012; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2005; Connorton et al., 2012). According to Walkup (1997), many of these outcomes can be attributed to the internal policies and culture of these organisations. Essentially, humanitarian workers are faced with immense pressure, much of which is self-imposed. Self-imposed pressure, originates from witnessing human suffering and desiring to 'improve the condition of those placed in their charge' and being unable to do so (Walkup 1997: 40). Workers are often limited by a lack of funding,

complicated relationships and negotiations with local and national government, the scale of needs, and many others. Humanitarian workers also encounter ethical dilemmas as the organisation's mandate can conflict with personal values and beliefs. In addition, very few aid organisations provide adequate training and most lack adequate support to address these issues (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2012; Eriksson et al., 2001). When support is offered, it is often only provided for international staff members, and national staff, who make up the majority of aid workers, are often neglected (Ager et al., 2012; Putman, et al., 2009).

These limitations and their psychological effects result in the implementation of coping mechanisms which have consequences on the productivity of the individual as well as the resulting treatment of refugees (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2012; Harrell-Bond, 2002, 2003; Walkup, 1997). As a result, poor and ineffectual policies and practices are continually born out of and are reinforced by these coping mechanisms (Walkup, 1997). According to Walkup, coping strategies will develop through four stages. The first is *overwork* which occurs when individuals work long hours and overwork themselves in order to try to accomplish more due to feelings of guilt and frustration. This leads to burnout or exhaustion: 'exhibited by physical illness, acute tension, chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, depression, diminished coping capacity, negativism, apathy, inflexibility, cynicism, irritability, and anger' (Walkup, 1997: 44). The second mechanism is *detachment* where individuals will spend less time directly with aid recipients and therefore are less informed of what is happening on the ground level, leaving them to make decisions from second hand reports. Workers will often surround themselves with other aid workers and employ a 'black humour' about the dire situations individuals find themselves (Walkup, 1997: 45).

When detachment is no longer possible, according to Walkup (1997) individuals begin to *transfer* blame to other factors, such as other organisations, the host country government, or even the aid recipients. In this stage 'refugees cease to be the people *with* problems; refugees *become* the problem' (Walkup, 1997: 46). According to Harrell-Bond (2002: 58) refugees are often seen as 'thankless, ungrateful, cheating, conniving, aggressive, demanding, manipulative, and even dangerous persons who are out to subvert the system.' During this stage, aid workers claim they have no control over the situation and refuse to admit their failings or the failings of the institutions they work for. Finally, *reality distortion* takes place, where individuals adjust their perceptions to cope with the inadequacies and to feel a sense of self-worth. Individuals will often see aid recipients as unable to suffer the same way that 'white' people do or will perceive the needs of individuals as less urgent (Walkup, 1997: 47).

Due to this, according to Harrell-Bond (2002: 24), humanitarian work becomes *inhumane*. According to Harrell-Bond (2003), UNHCR, and other humanitarian agencies, have been guilty of committing acts of violence against refugees and withholding food and essential services as means of punishment for noncompliance. Individuals are overwhelmingly treated like 'nameless numbers' and treated without dignity (Harrell-Bond, 2003: 141). Refugees often retell events citing poor treatment as well as a general lack of respect, using words such as 'humiliated, degraded, shamed and disgraced' describing humanitarian workers as 'patronizing and condescending' (Harrell-Bond, 2003: 142).

This research will analyse how these coping strategies contribute to the behaviour of service providers and the creation of policies. The research will analyse how this behaviour and these policies impact the wellbeing of refugees.

Informal Service Providers

Refugees, as a result of the above listed constraints, are left without access to resources and are left to create their own support systems, establishing connections with various informal institutions, utilising alternative strategies for survival (Hoffstaedter, 2015; Palmgren, 2013). Griffiths et al., (2005: 216) point out the 'untapped *added value*' of both voluntary and community organisations as they can be flexible, cost effective, and can provide more sensitive working practices. However, it is worth mentioning that there is a 'tendency to play down the role of structural constraints' that civil society groups face; even well organised and resourceful groups are faced with 'severe limitations' (Griffiths et al., 2005:208). As part of my inquiry into wellbeing strategies, I will explore how these informal networks are less restricted than formal humanitarian agencies and can be a highly effective resource for refugee communities in Bangkok, while simultaneously creating an understanding of the barriers they face.

2.4. Strategies – Livelihoods and Decision Making

> The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else.
> - Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

This thesis looks closely at the strategies, choices, and trade-offs people make when they are experiencing constrained circumstances, taking into consideration aspects such as culture, values, and aspirations in conjunction with the drive to fulfil basic needs, both material and psychological. In order to generate an understanding of these strategies, this section, first, provides a brief overview of livelihoods strategies and how they are seen as part of the wellbeing strategy. Second, this section briefly highlights the importance of the community and social

networks in establishing livelihood strategies for refugees. Third, the section examines how exposure to trauma, innumerable stresses, pressures, and shocks faced by refugees can physiologically and psychologically influence an individual's ability to effectively strategize and make decisions. This section will highlight the nascent and relevant literature surrounding decision making in constrained situations.

2.4.1. Livelihoods

The concept of livelihoods replaces that of labour markets in the social policy regime framework, where diverse strategies are used to make ends meet (Gough, 2013). Livelihoods can be defined as the system of the diverse and complex assets, capabilities, activities, and interactions necessary for living (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Scoones, 2009). Livelihoods are the complex combination of strategies in which people engage in order to combine assets to 'transform them into livelihoods outcomes' (Bebbington, et al., 2007: 180). In this sense, livelihoods are not only what people 'have and control' but what people 'think and do' within the cultural and political context (Bebbington et al., 2007: 179). The ability, or inability, to produce a livelihood also bears consequences on future capabilities and access to assets. In turn, these consequences will impact aspirations and future strategies (Bebbington et al., 2007), making the livelihoods process, much like wellbeing, an ongoing negotiation that is both intrinsically motivated and extrinsically influenced.

Livelihoods and wellbeing are inextricably linked for two major reasons. First, livelihoods strategies are more than the generation of income, they are a means in which to build and exercise capacities. As stated earlier in this chapter, in order to be well, SDT shows us that humans need to feel competent and productive, leading meaningful and constructive lives (Ryan and Sapp, 2007; White, 2015). Second, livelihoods can also be seen as constructed as part of an identity or seen as a way of life (Coulthard, et al, 2011), where individuals construct or derive a sense of meaning or self, based on the economic endeavours in which they engage. In this sense, the context is extremely relevant; constrained circumstances can lead to the inability to achieve wellbeing if one does not feel productive or able to participate in strategies which they and society have deemed valuable.

Approaches such as the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SL), the Urban Asset Vulnerability Framework, and the Resource Profile Approach (RPA) emphasise the holistic situation of the individual or household, stressing a number of important attributes or components, looking beyond income (Conway et al., 2002; White and Ellison, 2007). Livelihood frameworks are multidimensional, examine the assets and

resources individuals already own (both tangible and intangible), and demonstrate how assets and resources are used and transformed to satisfy needs (Bebbington et al., 2007). Livelihoods frameworks also examine how resources and assets are managed to ensure survival in the face of shocks and hardship, emphasising the importance of agency (Moser, 1998). At the same time, the approach allows for the examination of the role of structures, including both social and economic, as either an impediment or an aid to access and manage resources (Bebbington et al., 2007).

Although I expanded upon this, I use the University of Bath's Resource Profile Approach as the foundation for this framework as it incorporates some of the previously discussed aspects of wellbeing. The RPA is helpful in addressing the social and cultural construction of livelihoods based on the social, economic and political context (Saltmarshe, 2002). The approach pays particular attention to cultural and social resources, emphasising the role of relationships on livelihoods. The focus on relationships allows for the identification of structures and how structures contribute to agency or even differential inclusion (Saltmarshe, 2002). Due to these considerations this framework was used to guide data collection.

Livelihoods, Social Networks, and Refugees

Research has demonstrated the importance of social networks for positive livelihood outcomes, especially in migrant communities (Dorai, 2003; Griffiths et al., 2005; Korac, 2001; Lamba and Krahn, 2003; Massey et al., 1993). Therefore, networks are commonly accessed and relied upon by refugees when formal institutions fail to provide the services needed. These networks are seen as extremely beneficial as they increase the availability of resources (Griffiths et al., 2005; Hoffstardter, 2015; Korac, 2001; Palmgren, 2013). Overall, social ties and social networks allow refugees to access 'various forms of support and connections to resources' (Jacobsen, 2006: 282-283).

Research conducted in refugee community organisations suggests that the internal coherence of the group can be a resource in itself and that there is actually an over emphasis on the importance of formal networks (Griffiths et al., 2005). Palmgren (2013) documents a similar phenomenon amongst Vietnamese and Burmese refugees living in Bangkok. In order to survive, these groups rely on strong and weak ties, including family, friends, other refugees from similar backgrounds, and religious organisations. These social networks, 'varying in capacity and cohesiveness' serve 'the purpose of scraping together some form of a home and livelihood in the city' (Palmgren, 2013: 12).

2.4.2. Decision Making and Wellbeing: Theories from Psychology and Neuroscience

Sustaining a livelihood and achieving wellbeing require us to make a large number of decisions on a daily basis as we plan, manage, and strategize. The section below will help illustrate the psychological and neurological effects that trauma and stress have on the ability to effectively strategize and make decisions in constrained conditions.

Overall, a decision is made based upon how much the individual values or opposes the potential consequences. Decisions can be rational and strategic, but emotional and intuitive forces will influence the process as well (Starcke and Brand, 2012). Research in neuroscience has demonstrated that strategic decision-making does require a healthy and functioning neural network, including intact cognitive ability and executive function (Boyle et al., 2012; Pais-Vieira et al., 2009; Starcke and Brand, 2012; Zamarian et al., 2010). Both are necessary as they allow for categorisation, planning, and using working memory to consider and weigh options. In addition, sufficient time is needed in order to consider and weigh the importance of potential consequences (Starcke and Brand, 2012). Although these studies were mostly conducted in 'Western, developed' country contexts, with university students as the subjects, they do provide insight into how human behaviour and decision making can be influenced by physiological effects of stress and trauma.

Laboratory studies suggest that both acute and chronic stress interfere with decision-making and associated behaviour. Starcke and Brand (2012: 1234), in a review of research on decision making and stress describe how stress interacts and interferes with decision making. For example, high stress levels can result in 'dysfunctional strategy use.' Essentially this occurs when decisions are made quickly or prematurely, without weighing consequences, a common occurrence in high stress situations. As a result, risky decisions are often made. In laboratory studies, participants who were feeling stressed, gambled and chose the riskiest options with the most disadvantaged outcomes. In addition, when decisions are made in uncertain situations, physical stress levels are higher, which leads to clouded thinking. (Starcke and Brand, 2012: 1236). This is particularly relevant due to the precarious situations in which refugees find themselves, where decisions are made without the luxury of time or previous experiences in which to draw reference.

An additional study by Starcke et al. (2011) showed that individuals in the study were more likely to make egoistic decisions, or decisions that benefit the individual over the group, when faced with stressful situations. The findings suggest that stress induces fear, which interferes with empathy. Although using different definitions, findings from Youssef et al. (2012) support these

findings, especially in women. This study reinforced the idea that decisions are made from both a rational and an emotional space; during stressful times, individuals tend to use their emotions over strategic thinking, focusing on the outcomes of the individual over a group. Keeping in mind the relational aspects of wellbeing, egoistic decision making can be detrimental to community wellbeing.

Stress, Trauma, Poverty and cognitive functioning

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a common disorder attributed to those who have suffered extreme or prolonged trauma; 'PTSD occurs when a trauma leads to a sense of current threat' even though the threat has passed (Freeman et al., 2013). While all those exposed to trauma will not suffer from PTSD, those who do, will suffer a number of symptoms that are maintained or worsened over time (Aupperle et al., 2012). Refugees are a group that may be at a higher risk of PTSD, over other groups, as they are regularly reminded of on-going threats in their country of origin (Emdad et al., 2005). PTSD is a major impediment to both cognitive and executive functions and can interfere with the ability to make informed decisions. For example, those who suffer from PTSD demonstrate an inability to control or regulate emotions, maintain attention, switch attention between tasks, and even have extreme behavioural reactions, lower IQ test scores, short term memory loss, paranoia, and hallucinations (Aupperle et al., 2012; Emdad, 2005; Freeman, et al., 2013; Gracie et al., 2007; LaGarde, 2010; Starcke and Brand, 2012). This will, of course, have implications for planning, decision making, and the ability to concentrate on work or study.

Even for refugees who do not suffer from PTSD, there is evidence to suggest that poverty, stress, and trauma can interfere with cognitive function, which can negatively influence decision making. According to Mani et al. (2013) poverty and scarcity can lead to temporary or prolonged cognitive impairment and a reduction in cognitive functioning. These findings are bolstered by research done on intrusive thinking. Those who undergo trauma or extreme stress are more likely to experience intrusive thoughts, such as rumination about the past or worry about the future (Aikins et al., 2009; Bomyea and Lang, 2016; Michael et al., 2007; Munoz et al., 2013). These are particularly constraining in that individuals only have limited attentional resources in which to process concerns and think critically, therefore excessive rumination and worry can cause cognitive impairment (Munoz et al., 2013). Essentially when we find ourselves facing extreme levels of stress and trauma we will become preoccupied with thoughts that will impede our ability to focus on whatever current task in which we are engaged and interfering with well

thought out decision making. This can be a major obstacle for refugees who are constantly considering past trauma and current and future concerns.

As the success of livelihoods in refugee communities is dependent upon social networks and community cohesion, it is important to note the effect of trauma on trust. Studies (Freeman, et al., 2013; Gracie, et al., 2007) show that PTSD is highly correlated with paranoia, and those who are paranoid have highly correlated negative beliefs about others and themselves. One study (Freeman, et al., 2013) showed that those who suffer from PTSD, especially those who suffered physical assault from others, are often 'excessively' fearful of others.

Ambiguity, Rumours, and Relationships

Times of uncertainty and ambiguity can create high levels of stress. As a way of coping, rumours are often created to ease these levels of stress by explaining the unexplained in an attempt to avoid uncertainty. Some of the earliest research regarding rumours was conducted in the 1940s by Knapp (1944) and Allport and Postman (1965). Their findings showed that rumours were more than idle chatter, used to pass the time, but 'profoundly purposive, serving important emotional ends' (Allport and Postman, 1965: vii). More recent studies suggest that uncertainty, anxiety, distrust, and self and relationship-enhancement can account for the motivation of rumour (DiFonzo et al., 2013). Essentially, rumours are used to create explanations when levels of tension, stress, and uncertainty are high; 'rumors flourish in an atmosphere of uncertainty because they attempt to relieve the tension of cognitive unclarity' (Rosnow, 1991: 486).

DiFonzo et al. (2013) also find that rumours serve to organise social spaces and disseminate and reaffirm beliefs in group settings. Turner (2012; 2001: 222), during his time researching Burundian refugees in Tanzania, found that rumours were spread with regularity, or in the words of Turner, 'an astonishing amount.' However, rumours, as he saw, served as 'a way of constructing meaning' (Turner, 2001: 222). Turner (2001: 223), as well as Allport and Postman (1965), point out the fact the rumours are more prevalent in times of war and great uncertainty, but Turner submits that rumours do more than fill in gaps in information; they serve to 'try to cover up the crack in the symbolic order. Rumours can be conceived as fantasies that try to re-establish the taken for granted order of things as they used to be.' While this may function as a way of easing internal psychological or group tension, the spread of rumours can damage relationships and, coupled with issues of trust discussed above, have a detrimental impact in refugee communities. This is an important aspect as community cohesion, as state above will impact wellbeing strategies.

Overall, the physiological and psychological effects of stress, poverty, and trauma have important implications for this research. Service providers tend to point out how refugees in Bangkok behave in ways that may be seen as irrational, short-sighted, and counterproductive, especially in regard to livelihoods. However, the rational decision making process may be impeded by diminished cognitive ability and executive function, alongside of institutional factors that limit available options. Certain behaviours, decisions, strategies, and even inter and intra community relations can be attributed in part to these cognitive obstructions.

2.5. Wellbeing Strategies: A Holistic View

On a daily basis, people, all over the world, of varying socioeconomic status, make decisions that impact multiple aspects of their lives. To an outside observer, the decisions of another may seem irrational; if job A pays more than job B it may seem counter-intuitive to accept job B. However, we, as human beings, understand that many thoughts and considerations go into making decisions, outside of economic outcomes. Perhaps the commute is shorter to job B; perhaps the job setting is more relaxed so stress is minimised and other aspects of life can be more readily enjoyed; or perhaps job B is simply more satisfying. Any of these aspects can outweigh the financial incentives of job A, depending on individual values.

Although a central teaching of neoliberal economics is that utility maximisation drives decision making, others have proposed that the pursuit of goals, aspirations, and wellbeing motivates our decision-making (Coulthard, 2012; McGregor, 2009). Employing this logic, wellbeing can be viewed not only as an outcome, but as a strategy in itself, taking into account aspirations and capabilities. Viewing wellbeing as a motivation allows an overarching framework in which to generate an understanding of human behaviour and decision-making in a development context. Humans do make a significant effort to maintain 'normal, positive levels of subjective wellbeing' (Cummins et al. 2009: 29). It is only when faced with a perpetuated obstacles, that people are unable to employ sufficient coping mechanisms in order to adapt and reach a positive level of wellbeing.

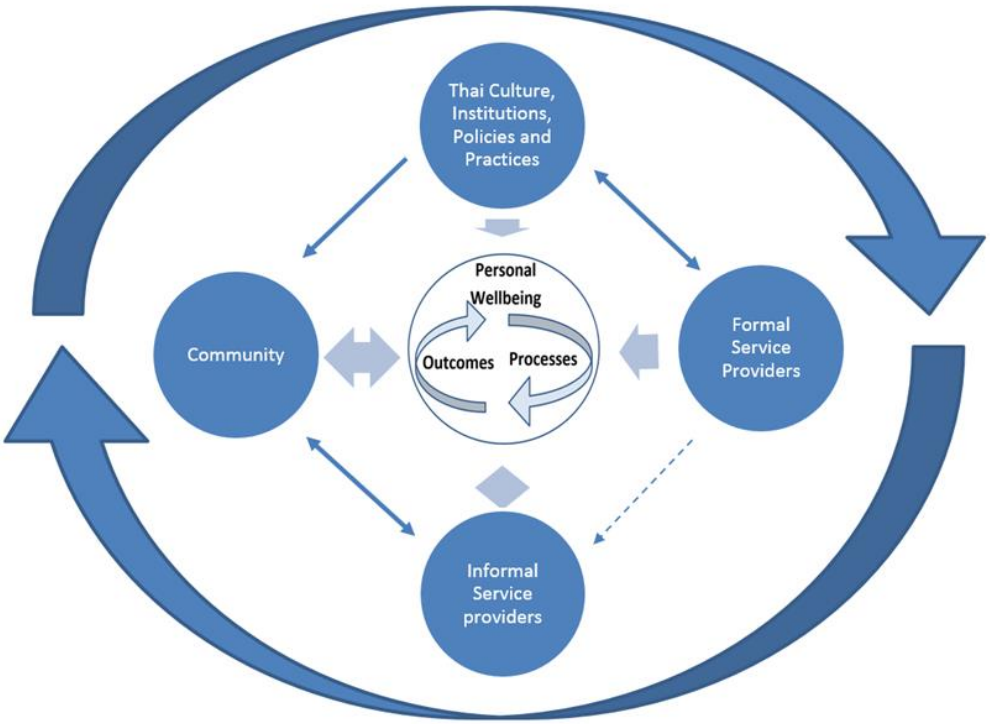
Through the development of this conceptual framework, I have attempted to provide the relevant literature to demonstrate that:

- Wellbeing is not only an outcome, but a holistic process that incorporates a wide range of needs.
- Human beings strategize and make decisions based on their desire to achieve wellbeing within their culturally and personally developed values.

- The context is relevant in that it determines the circumstances in which people find themselves and either impedes or enables us to pursue what we need to be well: in other words, our wellbeing strategies.
- The resulting circumstances (e.g. poverty and a lack of access to resources) can produce high levels of stress or trauma which can impact our ability to weigh consequences and chose the option which will be the most beneficial for our overall wellbeing outcomes.
- Humans will attempt to maintain positive levels of wellbeing within whatever context in which they find themselves. Unless the impediments are too numerous, wellbeing will be attained.
- Overall, our lives are a collection of wellbeing strategies, attempting to find balance through trade-offs and choices, seeking outcomes that feedback into the process.

The diagram below (figure 2.1) represents this conceptual framework within the context of Thailand. It shows that context, which is comprised of the entire welfare mix: 1) the Thai culture and the resulting institutions and policies; 2) the formal service providers; 3) the informal service providers and networks; and 4) the community as an organisation will influence the wellbeing processes and outcomes of individuals and households. Each agency of the welfare mix is interrelated; UNHCR's and the government, for example, directly impact the other, influencing and creating the conditions in which the individual and the household, are forced to navigate. However, not all relationships are multi-directional or mutually influencing. For example, the wellbeing processes and outcomes will contribute to the overall context in regards to informal networks and service providers as well as community dynamics. However, wellbeing results in limited influence on formal service providers and the Thai institutions.

Figure 2.1 The Wellbeing Framework



Individual wellbeing is placed in the centre of this diagram, as shown in detail in Figure 2.2, shows that wellbeing strategies are directly influenced by the various political, cultural and ideological factors which make up the institutional structure. In order to achieve wellbeing, individuals will engage in a range of wellbeing strategies, including varied livelihoods strategies and coping strategies. The resulting wellbeing outcomes are the result of these strategies, but also influence future strategies. In other words, the structures and institutions create the conditions that affect, not only wellbeing outcomes, but the wellbeing strategies that individuals employ.

Figure 2.2 Personal Wellbeing as Process and Outcome

Therefore, this research uses a framework that enables the analysis of the interplay of the psychological, sociological, political and economic aspects of the Palestinian-Syrian refugee experience in Bangkok. These perspectives are necessary in order to truly understand how individuals and households employ wellbeing strategies in the face of institutional constraints.

Chapter 3 Research Methods, Methodology, and Ethics

In order to generate an understanding of how Palestinian-Syrian refugees attempt to achieve wellbeing, I travelled to Bangkok, Thailand and spent from July 2013 to September 2014 in the homes of refugee families and individuals, sharing meals, talking, and generally hanging out. Time outside of the community was spent accompanying community members to appointments with service providers and visiting refugees in the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC). I also worked closely with service providers, attending official and unofficial meetings, volunteering[8], and engaging in various ad hoc activities such as fundraising. Unless I was sleeping or caught in Bangkok traffic, I spent day and night participating in the lives of refugees and working with refugee service providers.

Researching the wellbeing of such vulnerable populations is an extremely complex task, both ethically and logistically. Gathering in-depth, personal narratives during such a tragic time brings about a wide range of ethical, moral, and safety issues. As well as describing my methods and methodology for data collection below, I will also discuss the ethical issues, biases, and a number of other considerations and the resulting impact on my research.

3.1. Methodology and Research Design

3.1.1. Researching the Wellbeing of the Displaced

Researching both wellbeing and the forcefully displaced requires the adoption of holistic and interdisciplinary approaches (Colson, 2007; McGregor, 2007). This is due to the fact that the behaviour of individuals is complex, based on 'past experiences and the environments they inhabit which derive from the interplay of global forces and the activities of strangers' (Colson, 2007: 332).

According to McGregor (2007), when researching wellbeing, five key ideas must be taken into consideration and have been incorporated into my research methodology. My research, therefore:

1. is *person focused,* as only the individual can determine their own state of wellbeing, although placed within structures, institutions, relationships, communities, etc.;
2. acknowledges the *importance of relationships*, and also recognises that relationships are not always positive;

[8] See Table 3.1

3. emphasises and recognises the importance of *culture and the construction of meaning, norms, and values* for the construction of well-being;
4. considers wellbeing as *part of a wider process* of events, cyclical trends, and future outcomes;
5. and recognises that individuals are *resilient, creative, and adaptive.*

To answer this research question, (*How do individuals in Bangkok, Thailand attempt to achieve and maintain wellbeing?*) knowledge must be constructed regarding how individuals or families make decisions, develop strategies, and cope within the environment in which they live. Therefore, as highlighted in Chapter 2, this research requires an in-depth look into multiple aspects of the lives of refugees. This research, therefore, examines and analyses three aspects, which include 1) wellbeing as subjective, objective, and relational and how wellbeing related values are formed and realised, 2) the contextual and institutional, and 3) the strategies employed to access and use resources. These areas allow a holistic view in which to analyse and generate the knowledge necessary to answer the research question.

This research combines thick description and interpretation in order to 'grasp and render', in the words of Clifford Geertz (1973: 5), 'a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another…' Thick description requires an understanding of more than the situation, but how individuals feel about, describe, and make meaning of their current set of circumstances. In order to derive this information and to deeply examine and analyse the lives of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok, I employed a number of qualitative methods, such as participant observation, semi-structured and structured interviews, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews (the methods and use of each are detailed below). These methods allowed me to take part in the lives of the community members. Only after sitting on the floors of their homes, listening and discussing the various aspects and hardships in their lives was I able to understand, interpret, and describe the complexity of their situation.

The main participants of this case study were the individuals and members of households from the Palestinian-Syrian refugee community in Bangkok. Although there are potentially more than 40 refugee communities in Bangkok, only one refugee community was selected for close examination. This was done, first, in order to focus on one cultural group to acquire the depth needed to answer the research questions. Second, choosing one cultural group ensured that the nature of structures and their effect on the outcomes of individuals with similar advantages and constraints could be analysed. This also allowed for an examination of how various values,

approaches, available resources, and strategies can affect wellbeing outcomes. Other important factors, such as community dynamics, social and cultural resources, and livelihood strategies were examined in detail. This approach allowed me to view and analyse the interaction of agency and structure and to make comparisons across a similar set of circumstances.

Although I interacted with a large number of families and community members on a daily basis, through my time spent in the community, I selected approximately seven families and one individual[9], in which to centre my research. I spent the majority of my time with these families and conducted in-depth interviews with six individuals from the eight different households. The purpose of the research was not to obtain a statistically robust and representative analysis, but to acquire an in-depth understanding of the wellbeing strategies in which families and members of families engage and the variation of strategies. Depth of information is an important consideration for this study, as opposed to breadth.

3.1.2. Epistemology and Ontology

> *"What we call 'knowledge' in no sense represents a world that presumably exists beyond our contact with it."*
>
> - Glasserfeld (1992: 30 as cited in Flick, 2014: 77).

From the constructivist point of view, knowledge is a 'social product,' constructed by everyday interactions and institutions (Flick, 2014: 76-78). The constructivist paradigm asserts that knowledge is socially constructed and context dependent where multiple realities can exist at the same time (Mertens, 2010). The paradigm also stresses the importance of the point of view of the researcher, and cannot be seen as separate (Ibid). Geertz stresses that there are no 'social facts' waiting to be discovered and observed, but only a construction or interpretation of the experiences of others (as cited in Schwandt, 1994: 122). Therefore, I assume that meaning is created by the individual through their personal experience and my interpretation of this experience. Subscribing to this epistemological point of view, I entered the field with no hypothesis, but only an attempt to develop a deep understanding of the situation in which refugees found themselves.

However, when I arrived in Bangkok, I was still seeking some form of truth. I assumed that if I was able to corroborate and triangulate information I would be able to ascertain the reality of the situation for refugees living in Bangkok. However, after many months of attempting to view the situation from varying perspectives: as a refugee, a service provider, and as a researcher, I

[9] see the section 'community' below for information on participants – the complex relationships of participants make enumerating the families slightly complex

came to terms with the fact that truth was relative and changing. Truth also varied by individual, depending on their perspective, experience, and disposition. My perspective and position as a researcher shifted greatly in a short period. I realised that the 'truth' that I sought was a construction of the individual in relation to others (including me) and their surroundings, and was created by subsequent experiences. I was able to gather multiple views, but was never able to arrive at any one 'truth', and sometimes not even a coherent and consistent description of events. Especially considering the trauma that individuals faced, different realities were often recreated to explain the same event over and over by the same person. Based upon this understanding, my interpretation of these events is based upon the construction of the reality by the individual.

Approaches to Data Collection and Analysis

Following this ontological and epistemological point of view, taking into account my research question, data collection, and analysis, required inductive and interpretive approaches. Both approaches aim to create an understanding without preconceived variables or hypotheses to be tested (Hood, 2007; Rowlands, 2005; Schweitzer and Steel, 2008). For this research I borrowed strategies from both Grounded Theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Both strategies are inductive and begin with direct observations of a particular phenomenon and develop ideas, hypotheses, and theories by linking observed facts, searching for patterns, and interacting with re-emerging themes throughout the data collection process (Bailey, 2007; Bernard, 2006; Hood, 2007; Neuman, 2003; Punch, 2014; Schutt, 2015). Both approaches therefore allow for the inductive development of theories from the data. Grounded theory differs slightly from IPA as it is conducted in spirals of data collection, coding, analysis, writing, design, theoretical categorisation, and data collection (Hood, 2007: 154).

The IPA approach, rooted in the field of psychology, is used 'to explore in detail the experiences of how people make sense of their personal experience... (Schweitzer and Steel, 2008: 11). IPA attempts to produce data through the terms of the participants 'rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions,' which is 'an interpretative endeavour, because humans are sense-making organisms' (Smith and Osborn, 2015: 41). The strength of the IPA approach is that it is used to understand the phenomenon as a whole. Advocates for the IPA approach thus caution against examination of issues through too narrow of a lens during analysis. Proponents encourage a broader look at the patterns and themes that emerge in data while maintaining awareness of the context (Groenawald, 2004; Schweitzer and Steel, 2008). As this is a method used in the field of psychology, proponents of the approach recognise the

importance of maintaining a clear picture of research participants and how they are acting in and reacting to their environment. Analysis of the interviews was conducted through 'line by line coding', where every page of transcripts was thoroughly examined, identifying themes, relationships, and patterns.

3.1.3. Methodology and Methods

In seeking descriptive and in-depth knowledge, this research utilised a number of qualitative methods in which to answer the research question. The aim of employing these methods is to look beyond numbers, to explore meanings, relationships, experiences and how societal structures impact personal experiences and behaviours (Brockington and Sullivan, 2007). The main method employed for data collection for this research was participant observation. Data collected through these means were supported and enhanced by secondary data research and unstructured, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to create a deep understanding of the refugee experience, using one particular case study: Palestinian-Syrians residing in Bangkok. Although not all aspects of their lived experiences are universal, it paints a descriptive picture of the daily life of refugees. This research allows profound insight into wellbeing, taking into account both human suffering and resilience. Hockey and Forsey (2012: 73) suggest that such a 'descriptive/analytical' product, or a 'depiction of a people,' requires the incorporation of a number of methods of approaches. The two most important of which are participant observation and interviews.

Participant Observation

Participant observation, in the words of Bernard (2006: 342) "involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives." It allows the researcher to develop an understanding of the research participant within the context, by taking part in activities and living within the setting (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2013). Participant observation is used to understand human meaning, relationships, and the everyday experience. According to Bernard (2006: 342), participant observation has at least two very import uses. First, it produces experiential knowledge, allowing us to 'talk convincingly, from the gut' about the lives and experiences of others. Second, it produces effective knowledge that can produce theories and establish causation and an understanding of human motivation.

Bernard (2006) lists five reasons participant observation is a valid method in which to create an in-depth analysis. First, the method allows for individuals to collect a wide range of data, letting the researcher witness personal and even rare events. Second, after establishing trust, participant observation reduces the level in which individuals react to the researcher. Once they are accustomed to the presence of the researcher, people are less likely to modify their behaviour. Third, the method allows the researcher to gain a sufficient understanding in which to develop more relevant and useful questions. Fourth, living with others and engaging in their lives 'gives you an intuitive understanding of what is going on' (Bernard, 2006: 355). Fifth, and finally, it is the only way to develop an understanding of certain situations. For example, developing an understanding of social institutions 'is best achieved through participant observation' (Bernard, 2006: 356).

Participant observation also encompasses the notion of engagement, rather than merely witnessing, which allows for active listening and active observation (Hockey and Forsey, 2012). Simply put, this means actively participating while observing. For me, this meant attempting to learn their language, having meals with families, and even dancing in their living rooms. This also meant letting the young girls braid my hair and playing games with the children. These activities allowed me to not only experience aspects of their lives for myself, but to bond and build levels of trust. These levels of trust, accompanied with active listening allowed me to engage in topics of conversation that many other outsiders would not have been able to broach. I was able to ask questions for clarity, which was useful. More importantly, I was also able to ask personal questions and was included in moments of sadness and joy, where I became a confidant and a friend (the implications for possible bias are discussed in section 3.2.2.).

Participant observation is a useful tool in producing an in-depth description as it allows us to not only analyse what we hear, but also what we see. This method allows for us to see and partake in everyday practices and experiences (Aagaard and Matthiesen, 2016; Hockey and Forsey, 2012).

> *…a lived life is constituted by much more than dialogues and narratives.*
> - *Aagaard and Matthiesen, 2016: 40*

Participant observation was an extremely important method for this research because it allowed for me to not only record narratives and events, but to see the impact events and situations had on their lives. This is something that interviews and surveys, although extremely useful in their own right, do not allow. For example, a community member would often tell me they were tired, when in reality, I could see from the way they sat with their head down, trying not to cry that

they were exhausted as well as experiencing despair, dejection, and helplessness. Community members would tell me that they were sick, but I could see the extent to which they were by observing the way people moved, or did not move. Nadia, for example, due to an illness vomited after every meal without exception. However, the extent to which her illness affected her could not be understood through verbal communication. Witnessing her vomit into a bucket 5 or 6 times during each visit, because she was unable to get off of the floor fast enough to reach the toilet, showed me so much more about the quality of her life. When the ailment caused her to lose the majority of her teeth, I could see by the way she covered her mouth when she talked that she not only felt physically affected, but had also lost her dignity.

Interviews

While much was gained through witnessing the inarticulate, much of the remainder of my data were collected through interviews. A major limitation of participant observation is that 'not all phenomena can be observed' (Flick, 20014: 318). However, a way in which to address this issue is to incorporate the use of interviews alongside of participant observation. Interviews are useful because than can seek to uncover biographical information or can give details of things that cannot be seen, or might not be noticed, by the outside observer (Ibid). Interviews can range from mostly unstructured to entirely structured and can be used to collect anything from basic binary data- seeking a 'yes' or a 'no'- to complex oral histories or phenomenological data- seeking rich descriptions.

Interviews can range from informal, taking place on a living room floor, to very formal, taking place in an official setting. Informal and unstructured interviews can be useful in building rapport and uncovering new topics (Bernard, 2006). In the words of Rapport (2012: 53), an interview, much like any conversation, encompasses 'a to-ing and fro-ing of utterances or responses,' that can seem truly natural and casual. The difference, according to Rapport (2012) and others is that interviews are a conversation with a purpose.

These casual conversations cum interviews, of course, were a useful method for collecting data. These were essentially conversations and basic chit chat which followed no structure and were based on friendly exchanges. Participants were very curious about my life and family and American culture and often asked me many questions during this time. Bailey (2007: 96) describes unstructured interviews as a 'reciprocal process' where researcher and participant are on an equal standing. This type setting of can create an open environment which can allow for more open and honest conversations to take place (ibid). I found this to be the case. Due to this, during the most informal of times, it became difficult to draw a distinct line between when

participant observation ended and interviews began. At times interviews would begin before I had realised they were happening. Suddenly, information would be brought up that I found useful and I would start asking questions without, at first, even realising that I was conducting an interview. The downside of this method is that it requires researchers to regularly jot down notes, while trying to avoid distracting or disturbing the interviewees flow or train of thought. The alternative is to try to remember conversations at the end of the day when writing up field notes (Bernard, 2006). I found this rather stressful.

More formalised, mostly unstructured interviews were also conducted with both members of the refugee community and formal and informal service providers. The interviews with community members differed from the above described interviews as participants were fully aware that I was asking questions for the sake of my research (Bernarnd, 2006). During these interviews I was clearly asking for clarifications or more information about a given subject, sharing that it was for the purpose of my research, often using a recorder. While these interviews were more formal, they were still semi-structured or barely structured, interviews. The purpose was to allow for the interviewee some control over the conversation, and to provide interviewees the opportunity to be more open, as opposed to a structured interview (Flick, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with formal and informal service providers, for example. Semi-structured interviews tend to be more formal and carried out with individuals who will only be available for one interview, such as government officials (Bernard, 2006). A guide can be used to insure that all topics are adequately addressed, but not to entirely structure the conversation. These interviews are extremely useful when carried out by the researcher as opposed to field assistants, as they allow for the researcher some flexibility in what questions are asked and what data are sought (Bernard, 2006).

In-depth interviews are often classified as a form of semi-structured or open ended interview (Bernard, 2006; Flick, 2014); however, for the purposes of this research, I distinguish the in-depth interview from the others. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a daily basis, where only six ‘in-depth’ interviews were carried out. While these interviews were, of course, semi-structured and open-ended, their sole purpose was to delve deeply into the lives of participants and provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences. These stories were not just the relaying of facts, but the retelling of internalised experiences, and when stories are shared people are making sense of their lives and experiences (McAdams, 2012).

The purpose of these types of in-depth interviews is to 'uncover domains of the psychosocial experience that may be hard to reveal using other interviewing techniques' (Svasek and Domecka, 2012: 107). The in-depth interviews were conducted using aspects of IPA where data were collected 'capturing rich descriptions' of individuals and their experiences, allowing the respondent to critically discuss a topic at length, divulging detailed descriptions and perceptions (Groenewald, 2004: 11). This method allows the interviewee to express meaning and shed light as to how their background can influence this meaning. The technique also allows the interviewee a space to work through their past experiences in a way that semi-structured and structured interviews cannot, as the interviewer is regularly guiding the direction of the responses (Svasek and Domecka, 2012). While in-depth interviews can be limiting in themselves, as they are often based on a few encounters (Svasek and Domecka, 2012), the use of in-depth interviews alongside participant observation and semi-structured interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the situation. The richness of data captured through these descriptions have shaped this thesis, and are included in the text.

The downside of these interviews are that, to be useful, they can only be conducted with a small number of participants. However, due to this, these interviews provide rich data and can generate sufficient evidence to demonstrate variations in thinking and perceptions. Proponents of the IPA approach emphasise that a small sample size, between two and ten, are the most useful to adequately uncover deep issues (Groenewald, 2004; Lester, 1999; Smith, 2004). In fact, according to Smith (2004: 42), it is only possible to produce a 'detailed, nuanced analysis' with a small sample.

Methods: Answering the Question

As discussed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, I break down the research question *(How do individuals in Bangkok, Thailand attempt to achieve and maintain wellbeing?)* into three areas for analysis: wellbeing, context, and strategies. This section highlights how data were collected for each area.

Understanding Wellbeing

In order to generate an understanding of what was needed to achieve and maintain the wellbeing of individuals and families in the community, I gathered data on what families valued most and what they felt they needed. This was done through focusing on the day to day experiences of individuals and families, the construction of meaning of their current situation, how they viewed the past, and the decisions they made in the direst of situations, and the trade-offs they made that showed what they were the most reluctant to give up. Through this, I built

an understanding of the aspirations and values of the individuals/family – the most essential factors to live a valued life. Data was gathered using in-depth interviews and participant observation. The in-depth interviews lasted anywhere between 2.5 to 6 hours, depending upon the participant. Three of the six interviews were conducted in multiple sessions due to interruption, illness or fatigue.

While it may seem counter-intuitive to only select a small sample in an attempt to develop a holistic understanding, Smith (2004: 42) points out that 'delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal' concluding that 'the very detail of the individual also brings us closer to significant aspects of a shared humanity' (43). In this sense, Smith means that while circumstances may appear to be different, we actually share much with others at the deepest levels of humanity. I found this reflection both profound and relevant in my research findings. I found the more I engaged with the community members, the more I realised we are humans struggling to achieve the best lives we can for ourselves and the people we love, regardless of our cultures, beliefs, and values.

Understanding the Context

This research sought to understand how structures and institutions contributed to the opportunities and impediments of the situation in which refugees found themselves. This is visually demonstrated in the conceptual framework given in Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2, where the nature of institutions and the consequences either impede or assist individuals in achieving wellbeing. In order to understand this context in Bangkok, Thailand, I collected data on the institutional constraints imposed by Thai culture, society and legislation. I attempted to generate an understanding of how these constraints translated into the lived experiences of refugees. I collected data on the effects of Thai law and culture on service provision and available resources, including education, health care, security and other objective indicators of wellbeing.

Data was collected via multiple methods. Secondary data research was conducted, consisting of a descriptive analysis of legislation, policies and mandates, and evidence on the general socio-cultural and political context of Thailand and its stance on outsiders. The desk review allowed for an in-depth analysis of the situation. However, clarification and additional data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with key informants from the community, informal service providers, and representatives from four NGOs. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with two lawyers and one academic from the National Institute of Development Administration, regarding Thai culture and politics. I conducted participant observation while attending meetings with service providers and was constantly working to corroborate and triangulate

through informal interactions with service providers, the community, and key informants. Semi-structured interviews with families also provided data on the effects of policies on livelihoods and service provision.

During my fieldwork, I attempted to interview Thai policy makers and government officials. I had intended to wait until the end of my fieldwork after appropriate contacts had been established with the most relevant individuals. I was also intending to corroborate and clarify aspects of the desk review and other findings from the year. However, after the military coup on 22 May 2014, my contacts at the US Embassy and the executive director of a Thai NGO informed me that this was no longer a possibility. Due to this I was unable to gather data from the perspective of the Thai government. I found this detrimental to my research. Overall, I was never able to fully understand how the government reasoned or justified their policies. This means that my findings were only from the perspective of outsiders, which tend to be biased against these policies due to their adverse impact on the refugee community.

Understanding the Strategies

The concepts of coping and wellbeing were used in order to build an understanding of the related aspects of adaptation, change, construction of meaning, and perceptions. These concepts are extremely important as they allow a lens to view the psychological strategies alongside the livelihoods strategies, to construct an analysis regarding how individuals make decisions and choose to live their lives. As stated in Chapter 2, wellbeing, both subjective and objective, is a driver of human behaviour and decision making. Therefore, this research builds an understanding of how this particular group seeks to achieve and maintain wellbeing as they navigate institutional constraints. As discussed in Chapter 2, values matter in the wellbeing strategies of individuals, therefore this research also sought to understand how values either inhibit or assist in the wellbeing process. Data was generated by conducting six in-depth interviews with members of five families and one individual adult male. Data was also generated through participant observation in more informal settings and during chats.

In order to gain an understanding of how the institutional landscape affects the various strategies, I examined the many livelihoods strategies individuals employed. I attempted to look holistically at picture of resources, assets, economic strategies and the impediments generated from the institutional landscape. This was done by investigating the various networks, NGOs and religious organisations, jobs sought and accessed, remittances received and numerous other strategies, some of which included begging, dishonest practices, and stealing. I attempted to generate an understanding of how each family was part of the livelihoods process, how

individuals sought to access services, what assets they already possessed and were able to control, and how this changed over time. Data was collected through participant observation in the community, semi structured interviews with heads of households, semi-structured interviews with service providers, and questioning multiple key informants.

Early on in the research, I attempted to have families fill out a questionnaire based on the Resource Profile's Approach discussed in Chapter 2. However, the first family laughed at my attempt to compartmentalise their lives into such structures and asked if they could just tell me the stories of their arrival and life in Thailand. They informed me that they could only accurately convey information through stories; they must be told from beginning to end, or it would not make sense. I found this to be the case; families were so bored and confused when I tried to go through the questionnaire: "That is only part of the picture, Michaelle, if you want to know about that, you have to know the whole story," Mohammed told me. Therefore, I conducted interviews and participant observation in homes in order to collect data and piece together the situation regarding their available resources, including assets, relationships, human capital, and others through their stories.

In order to generate a clearer understanding of the social resources and networks, I attempted to use a number of participatory methods, namely social mapping, alongside network and resource mapping. This would have been a clear and practical method as opposed to collecting data via interviews or listing, which may not allow for adequate reflection on the part of the respondent or demonstrate the complexity of their situation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2008). However, individuals did not see their contacts as assistance networks and the assignment did not lead to much fruitful discussion. Therefore, information was gathered during visits and interviews.

Table 3.1 Overview of methods

Method	Actor	Details
Participant observation/ informal conversations	Refugees in Palestinian-Syrian community	Spending time in communities and at the IDC
	Refugees in Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Vietnamese communities	Volunteering in communities (visiting families, overseeing activities such as field trips and cooking with children)
	Service providers	Volunteering in offices and at events, attending meetings
	Informal service providers	Volunteering in offices and at events, at IDC, attending meetings

Interviews	Households (6)	In-depth interviews
	Service providers (8)	Semi-structured
	Informal service providers (4)	Semi-structured
	US Embassy Official	Semi-structured
	Lawyers (2)	Semi-structured
	Academic (1)	Semi-structured

Research Participants

Below is a list of the families, and their members, with which I worked the most closely and the formal and informal service providers that I interviewed.

Families

Although I interacted with many other community members through my visits, and those interactions informed my research, I spent the vast majority of my time with these families, and Ibrahim.

1. Nadia (sister of Amer – although estranged & mother of Faruq)
    a. Faruq (35 years) married to Abeer with one son, Mohammed (8 years)
    b. Son, married with 3 children (ages 1 month to 4 years)
    c. Son, married 1 daughter, wife pregnant
    d. Son, single
    e. Son, single (26 years)

2. Ziad (met at NGO meeting) and Reema
   Husband and wife 25 and 26 years – no children, lives with a Fouad's brother – Nizar, 21 years old

3. Ahmad and Abeer (wife in IDC – met Abeer in IDC, introduced to husband by NGO)
    a. Daughter 14
    b. Son 13
    c. Son 8 (in IDC)
    d. Daughter 3 (In IDC)

4. Mohammed (met in IDC) and Fatima
    a. Son 16
    b. Son 14
    c. Son 10
    d. Daughter 7

5. Hayder 33 (no in-depth interview – met through Mohammed)
    a. Sister, Farah in IDC
    b. Brother in law in IDC
    c. Niece in IDC 2.5 years
    d. Nephew in IDC 1.5 years

6. Ibrahim, 23 years old single (Nephew of Amer and Nadia- met at IDC – regular visitor)

7. Nasir (wife and children in IDC, one child in Canada, met at IDC) (no in-depth interview)

8. Amer and Rana (Brother of Nadia – met through Fouad and Nadia)
    a. Daughter 10
    b. Son 6

Service Providers

Table 3.2 Service Providers – Interview list

Organisation	Position
Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network	Director
Asylum Access	Director
Jesuit Refugee Services	Head of urban refugee programme and head of communications
UNHCR	Head of social protection and protection officers
COERR	Head of organisation
TCR	Head of organisation
BPSOS	Programme officer
APRRN	Programme officers
CCSDPT	Head of Bangkok office

Table 3.3 Informal Service Providers – Interview list

Organisation	Position
Evangelical Church of Bangkok	Volunteer programme coordinator
Calvary Baptist	Missionaries
In Search of Sanuk	Lead volunteer
Women's volunteer group	Lead coordinator

3.1.4. The Analysis

Analysis for this research, in line with the grounded theory approach, was conducted on an ongoing basis. After each day, I would return home and type up field notes, recording what people had said and my general impressions. The subsequent morning, with a clear head, I reviewed notes in order to highlight trends, patterns, or new information that had come to light. In this manner I would be sure to prepare any follow up questions in order to clarify or corroborate information that I was uncertain about. This allowed to me to be intuitive and adaptive when gathering data and proved to be a useful method.

Upon return from field work, the analysis process was thorough and painstaking. I first worked to transcribe all interviews that I had conducted, accounting for roughly 30 hours. I organised the interviews and field notes chronologically and printed out the material, comprising three to four hundred pages. I then read through each page, line by line. According to Berg (1995) the purpose of reading is to reinforce hypotheses that were already formed in the field and create

new hypotheses while seeing the data all together as a whole. This stage generated many new ideas and revealed patterns that were once unseen.

After this stage, I began coding key phrases and recurring ideas and themes, what Berg (1995) refers to as *open coding*. I then began to look beyond the words and began to pay particular attention to that which was not said. For example, I carefully examined the words used in the interviews against the daily field notes, trying to make sense of any cognitive dissonance (e.g. were they saying one thing, but then displaying a different behaviour in daily activities?) I looked for the importance individuals placed on certain topics, not just through their words, but through the unspoken. For example, what made people smile and laugh and what made them cry. I carefully read through the in-depth interviews, trying to understand their experience based on their background, ideals, and values. Through this, I developed an understanding about the nature of wellbeing for this particular population.

I was able to categorise the codes into key concepts and organised and grouped the text by concept. I found compartmentalising their lived experience quite difficult, but this grouping allowed for me to write about topics separately and then organise and place them in an order I felt useful for myself and the reader. Through this, I was able to write and conduct deep analysis simultaneously. Charmaz (2006: 151) suggests that the analysis stage, especially when using a grounded theory approach, extends through to the writing stage, and that writing 'presents opportunities for drafting new discoveries with each revision.' Charmaz (2006: 154) submits that the writing process allows the researcher to see more clearly, thus a 'crucial phase of the analytic process.' Eventually, these pieces came together under the framework to embody the thesis.

3.2. The Ethics of Refugee Research

> "…*forced migration research needs the whole gamut of qualitative and quantitative techniques*…"
>
> - Castles, 2003: 29

The ethics of conducting research with the forcefully displaced are widely considered and debated by academics from the macro level (Bakewell, 2008; Castels, 2003; Harrell-Bond, 2007; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Rogers, 2003; Schmidt, 2007; Turton, 1996) to the micro level (Hugman et al., 2011a; Lammers, 2007; Miller, 2004; Pittaway et al. 2010). These debates are something that weighed heavily during the development of my methodology and methods and were seriously and thoughtfully considered before embarking on my research. Macro level debates take into consideration the relevance of research, e.g. its influence on policy and practices on a national or international scale. On the micro level, ethical debates are concerned

with power dynamics, reliving trauma, creating disturbances in the refugee communities, and a number of other psychological issues that can be brought up by a researcher. Essentially, there is consensus that research should 'do no harm' on a micro level, not leaving individuals distressed or worse off personally, at the very least (Hugman et al., 2011b). On a wider level, forced migration and refugee researchers tend to agree that the purpose of research should be greater than the pursuit of knowledge and should be concerned with the alleviation of the suffering of others.

In accordance, much research is framed to address policy issues to ensure findings are relevant and serve to improve the lives of forced migrants (Bakewell, 2008). Bakewell suggests that this focus on policy relevance, which 'can be read as a proxy for practical relevance' narrows the scope of refugee research and can 'render invisible' certain groups and research questions that are 'methodologically difficult to capture' (2008: 433-434). Essentially the emphasis on policy relevance can cause a simplification of research and encourage a focus on direct, practical outcomes rather than understanding the nuances of a highly complex situation that is forced displacement and refugee studies. For this reason, my research provides a deep description of this complex situation in order to build a holistic understanding of the experience of what it is to be a refugee within this particular context.

Accompanying the emphasis on policy relevance is a debate of appropriate methods for producing policy relevant research. Jacobsen and Landau (2003: 194), for example, suggest that small sample, in-depth studies are not useful for advocacy or influencing policy due to their lack of representation and 'do not allow us to make accurate descriptive inferences.' Rodgers (2004: 21), points out that this line of thinking incorrectly accepts the following four assumptions: 1) Researchers already know all of the relevant questions; 2) certain aspects of the lives of the displaced are unimportant- all that matters are key variables that can be tested; 3) quantitative data produce better and more accurate policies than inductive and subjective data; and 4) the cost of producing large data sets in a difficult field outweighs the benefits of producing a 'precise understanding of their predicament.' Further, the inclination towards quantitative research tends to produce data that overlooks the relationships between structures, policy, and institutions and the lived social experience of the individual (Rodgers, 2004). Similarly, Castells, a proponent of a wide range of methods in the field of forced migration and migration studies, submits that 'there can be no local studies without an understanding of the global context and no global theorisation without a basis in local research' (Castells, 2003: 23). Overall, the questions we ask should dictate the methods, although in the field of refugee studies and in crisis, ethical considerations must be made on both a micro and macro scale (Schmidt, 2007).

3.2.1. Doing Refugee Research Ethically – Ethical decisions in the field

Researching refugees is an ethically complex undertaking. Refugees in urban areas do not normally want to be found and are not always trusting of outsiders. Making contact and building and maintaining trust is not a straightforward task. Refugees are faced with significant daily challenges and stressors and most are not willing to make time for an inquisitive PhD student. In addition to this, it is difficult to know who they can trust after their experiences in their home country and the experiences in the new country. Therefore, I felt I must approach the community with something to offer, and always felt it difficult to find the balance between 'helping' and researching.

This section explains and reflects upon how I managed access to refugee communities, my role as both a service provider and a researcher, and many other ethical implications.

Choosing research participants- issues of access

When I arrived to Bangkok in July with my research question in mind *(How do individuals in Bangkok, Thailand attempt to achieve and maintain wellbeing?)*, I had yet to choose a community on which to focus. With at least 40 different refugee communities to choose from, I understood that I would have to wait and see what opportunities and challenges would present themselves. As such, I spent my first three months familiarising myself with the appropriate gatekeepers, attending meetings, volunteering, and gathering research on both the Thai context and the UN/NGO environment.

Access to communities is made complex due to lack of trust, but other issues such as language and location in the city add to this complexity (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). Due to this, I attempted to access groups through gatekeepers, or service providers, to help in identifying and accessing potential research participants. The ethical and methodological concerns associated with accessing vulnerable groups through gatekeepers are quite well known (Crowhurst, 2013; Dona, 2007; Pittaway et al., 2010; Hugman et al., 2011a). There are issues of power imbalances, resulting in a tacit coercion to participate; gatekeeper bias, which means gatekeepers select participants they see as fitting, when they may or may not be; and participants holding back information due to feared consequences, such as diminished aid. However, in refugee contexts, it is a necessary means by which to find participants.

When living in Bangkok previously (2009-2011), I had volunteered with an informal service providing volunteer organisation called In Search of Sanuk, and when I returned to Bangkok, I resumed this role. The executive director/lead volunteer, understanding my need to work

closely with other service providers, cleverly offered me the position of 'volunteer liaison officer,' which granted me automatic access to every meeting and to correspondence (also freeing him up to work on other aspects of the business of the small and struggling organisation). During these meetings I identified myself as a volunteer and a PhD researcher and was able to schedule meetings and interviews with other service providers (I further reflect upon my positionality in this role in the sub-section 'trust and maintaining access').

While the community of formal service providers was happy to give interviews and offer insights, many of these groups were not helpful in the identification of or arranging access to refugee groups. Even after establishing working relationships with service providers, requests for access were often met with uncomfortable reactions, such as, "let me ask…" or "well, we have to worry about confidentiality…" During a meeting in August 2013, the head of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) overheard me in my attempts to access potential participants. He pulled me to the side and informed me that my efforts would be in vain. He informed me that gatekeepers are not only overprotective, but also feel ownership of refugees. He informed me that I needed a new strategy, which I was already beginning to realise[10].

My tactic shifted to engaging in volunteer work. I began visiting the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) with other informal service providers and independent volunteers. Eventually, it was at a consultation, hosted by APPRN that I was introduced to two important members of the Palestinian-Syrian community, Faruk and Ziad. They invited me to their community and this is where the relationship with the community began.

Why Palestinian-Syrians?

The decision to focus my research on the Palestinian-Syrian community rather than other groups, such as the Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Rohingya, or Vietnamese, was based on a number of factors. First, the Palestinian-Syrian community, although relatively small, comprised roughly 400 – 500 members (at the time) as compared to the potential 5,000 Pakistani asylum seekers, represents a growing trend in urban refugee dynamics that is under researched (see Chapter 1).

Second, the Palestinian-Syrian community was relatively easy to access as opposed to other communities. At the outset, the Palestinian-Syrian population invited me into their homes, and logistically, the community was easier to access. For example, African communities, which are comprised of the Somalis, Congolese, and others were very fragmented and small in size. Individuals lived in different areas of the city and most tried to live independently and isolated

[10] Field notes from 20 August 2013

from others in order to avoid unwanted attention. It was difficult to make and maintain contact with individuals from these groups. The Palestinians, on the other hand, were, at the time of research, located in four major areas of the city and were in close contact with one another, for the most part. This aspect made participant observation more feasible, as it allowed me to gather more data as I had access to multiple families during each visit. Language was another important factor in choosing a research group. For example, the Vietnamese community, which is manly divided into three ethnic-linguistic groups, did not include any fluent English speakers and very few Vietnamese speakers, making translation very difficult. Many Palestinian-Syrians spoke English, and for those who did not, translators were easily available.

Another major consideration for research is my positionality. Being a single, white, American female in my 30s, I was faced with some challenges and opportunities. I had found that these attributes had limited me from working with certain groups, and had allowed me entry into others. For example, the Rohingya populations were extremely well hidden throughout Bangkok. They mostly survive, according to a member of the Thai-Muslim community in Bangkok, through the charity and care of the mosques in Bangkok. Most of these mosques are extremely traditional, as are the associated service providers, and they would not have worked readily with an American female.

Being a white American, it seemed that many assumed that I had unlimited funds and was able to assist financially. Thus I was asked for substantial amounts of financial support from some groups, which made working with these groups very difficult. However, I had found my background and positionality to be extremely helpful in the case of the Palestinian-Syrian community. I had found them to be at times mistrusting of outsiders, but generally seem to welcome the Western, international community, especially women. Some community members sought friendships outside of the Palestinian-Syrian community as they felt more comfortable confiding in outsiders as opposed to community members.

Trade-offs

Choosing the Palestinian-Syrians as the focus of my research resulted in a number of trade-offs. First of all, the members of the community were new to Thailand, unlike the Sri Lankans or Vietnamese for example, who had been in Thailand for more than five years. Most Palestinian-Syrians had only been in the country anywhere between 1.5 years to a few days, which meant that their survival and livelihoods strategies may not have been as diverse as other groups who have been struggling for longer; however, this did change over the course of my fieldwork. Also, through my work with other communities and through different NGOs, I had been able to obtain

a more general understanding of strategies employed by those who have lived in Thailand for longer periods.

In addition to this, due to high levels of education and English language ability, some members of the Palestinian-Syrian community were better off than those from other communities, although, again, this changed over time. Some of the families that I had worked with were able to negotiate rental rates for housing and seek legal counsel, which was rare for members of other communities who did not have money, proficient language skills, or higher education. However, the situation in the community did vary by family, which allowed me to witness a variety of wellbeing strategies.

Selecting participants

Issues of accessibility and trust meant that snowballing and purposive sampling methods were necessary in order to find research participants. Both purposive sampling and snowballing are commonly used methods when researching 'hard to reach' or vulnerable populations as other techniques are not feasible (Bernard, 2013; Peterson and Valdez, 2005). Of course, this then creates an issue of representation, variety, and validity (Cohen and Arielei, 2011; Peterson and Valdez, 2005). To combat this issue, I attempted to access community members from different points of entry, utilising as many contacts as possible to follow more than one network (Willis, 2006). The selection of the families was done through a snowballing strategy. I understand that the sample is, therefore, by no means, random, but due to the nature of the research, randomly seeking participation was not a possibility.

Snowballing and points of entry

My initial entry point into the community was through Ziad and Faruk, who invited me to one of the four sub-communities in Bangkok[11]. At this point I began to visit regularly with Faruk and his wife, Faruk's mother Nadia, and Nadia's other 4 sons and their wives and children. I started taking Arabic classes with Ziad and Reema, and through them met Amer and Rana and their children.

Concurrently, I was visiting the IDC two times a week. On Mondays I was visiting the Vietnamese Hmong with a woman's group, comprised mostly of independent volunteers. On Thursdays I was visiting mostly Pakistanis, with a group of Christian missionaries. It was through these regular

[11] When I began my research the Palestinian-Syrian community was living in four, what I call, sub-communities around the outskirts of Bangkok, making up the entire Palestinian-Syrian refugee community.

visits that I made contact with three Palestinian-Syrian families who each had at least one family member in the IDC. This happened during one of my visits in November, I noticed a woman in a hijab with two small children. I enquired about them and found out her name was Abeer and they were Palestinian-Syrians; they had been caught in Bangkok with five others: Mohammed, Iman, Iman's two sons, and their friend Diaa. Soon after, I was contacted by Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) and asked if I would visit Abeer on behalf of her husband, Ahmad, who could not visit due to his expired visa.

During these visits I met Iman's husband, Nasir who had a valid visa and visited every day. I also met Mohammed, who was arrested with the others. He asked me to check on his wife, Fatima; he was worried that she would be lonely as she was outside of the IDC taking care of their four children on her own. I then started to regularly visit Fatima and her four children. These visits to the IDC and to visit their spouses helped me to earn respect and trust in the community. Once Ziad said, "you are doing something our own community is not willing to do, and that is very meaningful to us." Of the community members with valid visas, only four individuals made regular IDC visits. One of these four individuals was Ibrahim, a 23-year-old man who fled Syria to avoid military conscription. He was also Faruk's cousin.

Months after visiting Fatima and Mohammed (he had been released from the IDC on bail at this point), Mohammed called me and asked me for a favour, he wanted me to help his friend named Hayder. Hayder's sister had illegally entered Thailand and was caught at the airport and sent to the IDC with her two young children and husband, Hasham. Hayder came from a refugee camp in Lebanon to try and help her. Hayder spoke very little English and arrived in Bangkok alone. When he arrived he sought the assistance of a fellow community member, who was able to extort a substantial amount of money from him. After this event, Hayder was desperate and sought the help of Mohammed, who introduced me to Hayder. At that time I began to visit his sister, Farah at the IDC.

I spent time with Hayder and Nasir both at the IDC and at their homes. While they provided me with an exceptional amount of data and information, we never conducted in-depth interviews because both lived in isolation from the rest of the refugee community and would not allow translators, who were other community members, into their homes. Their English was not sufficient to conduct in-depth interviews without translators.

Trust and maintaining access

Trust and rapport are imperative to collecting valid data (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). 'Hanging out' is the only way for researchers to get to know individuals outside of a professional role, moving from an 'ignorant intruder to welcome, knowledgeable intimate' (Kawulich, 2005: 38). This process can involve participating in daily activities or working with/alongside participants. Rapport can only be built over time by active listening, contributing to the lives of participants, and showing commitment to the wellbeing of participants (Kawulich, 2005).

However, being granted access to 'hang-out' has ethical implications. Trust is difficult to build and maintain in refugee communities due to the inherent incredulous, or even suspicious, nature of most communities. Individuals have seen the worst of humanity: torture, unlawful imprisonment, senseless war crimes, and so on. In addition to these atrocities, being an extremely vulnerable population has resulted in refugees being the victims of coercion, scams, blackmail, and overall inhumane or poor treatment by local populations, varying from poor working conditions to discrimination, or worse. In this regard it is difficult to maintain regular access without offering something in return to the community.

Furthermore, there are very few obvious incentives for their involvement in research, and any perceived incentive to assist could have worn off quickly, especially if research participation is seen to be time consuming or intrusive. Another potential issue is that refugees may be worried about the image they may portray to the rest of the world and do not want to be seen as representatives of the community. This was an issue that I came across in more than one household. Finally, without a large amount of trust, participants cannot be sure the researcher will not exploit their story for their own personal gain.

At the same time, I believe in the idea that, when conducting research with refugees, the concept of 'do no harm' is not sufficient (Hugman et al., 2011b). It is not acceptable for someone to gather data and walk away and say, 'they are no worse off,' or justify their intrusion into the lives of refugees by saying 'our research findings will influence policy and be useful for them later.' Many refugees do not have 'later' and are currently living in some of the worst possible conditions, both mentally and physically. Therefore, I took the position that researchers should not withhold assistance in an attempt to stay objective or to refrain from 'skewing' results. Overall, the lives of refugees are so complexly difficult, that assisting them on any scale will not alleviate their suffering in the long term or the short term, and will have a relatively minor impact on their lives.

Personally, as an educated English speaker, familiar with the context, Thai law, and the policies of service providers and UNHCR, I felt obliged to help where I was able. Although, I could do very little for them. I lacked funds so never made monetary contributions, but I did direct refugees to where they could seek legal or medical assistance, I visited prisoners at the IDC, I found answers to legal questions through my contacts, I set up some small and short term cooking/livelihood projects, and I collected in-kind donations (books and clothes) for the children in the community. These contributions were not sufficient to impact their overall situation to the level that it would skew the results of this research. However, the ethical issue then becomes, *when am I a researcher* and *when am I an aid worker*? This is what Jacobsen (2003) calls reactivity, where researches become too involved, which can be seen as unethical.

In order to mitigate my ethical issue of balancing the roles of NGO/aid worker/PhD researcher, I let each family know I was in both positions. During the first meeting I told them about my research and what I was studying and why. Most of the community is well educated and understood what I was researching. I explained that I would use participant observation as much of my research and began to do so. I assured them that I would just be observing their daily lives and would not be too intrusive, and they were allowed to, at any time, let me know if there was anything they would like me to leave out. There was such a high level of awareness that I was conducting research that Ziad once expressed his sadness that they were in such a situation that would warrant being researched: “Our lives are so terrible that we have become the centre of research. We never thought this could happen to us. How did we get here?” I asked if he wanted me to leave him out of the study and he said “No, it does not bother me, plus maybe it will help someone someday.”

3.2.2. Positionality and the Ethical Considerations

Having positioned myself in the middle of multiple families and groups, I was a confidant, a friend and, in many ways, an aid worker or a type of informal case worker. I am very aware that my positionality and my subsequent actions had many ethical implications. First, as a friend and confidant I was concerned that I was deceiving or breaking trust by recording personal conversations that were at times extremely heart-felt and personal. I would try to mitigate this by asking before I left each visit if it was ok for me to write about what they had told me. Only once did someone tell me no. Secondly, I realise my actions could create their own biased behaviour on behalf of the refugees. As a pseudo-case worker, I tried to help the community access resources and gain answers to questions. At the same time, I did not want them to see me in this capacity because I was afraid they would withhold information so that I would help

them. Over time I began to realise when this was the case and, as mentioned previously, I never provided monetary support.

Biases and the Ethical Considerations

Over the course of this research, I closely considered the following biases and the resulting ethical considerations:

- Biases *toward* the community: My proximity to the community resulted in a strong empathy and sympathy. I had a tendency to sympathise with the community and mentally side with them over service providers.

  Implication: This may have resulted in too harsh of a criticism of service providers. In this case I tried to stay aware of this potential bias and pay close attention to the behaviour of the organisations as a whole and not demonise their actions, something that is easy to do from the perspective of the refugee.
- Biases *within* the community: I formed close attachments to those who were of a similar age, education, and worldview.

  Implication: Being overly empathetic with these individuals likely resulted in believing their stories over others when they contradicted. I tried to stay conscious of this and remain neutral to the best of my ability.
- Biases *against* members of the community: I felt anger toward those who were at the centre of many negative rumours (theft, coercion, child abuse, and domestic violence for example).

  Implication: I wanted to avoid these individuals and considered removing them from my research. I tried to remind myself to stay neutral, that they were just rumours, and even if they were true it was not my place to form judgements, but to observe and listen.

3.2.3. Additional Considerations

Living outside the community

I chose to live outside of the community for a number of reasons. First, the housing situation for the families was constantly changing, I was apprehensive to rent something in the community due to this. Sections of the community had to relocate at a moment's notice due to the threat of being caught by the police and being put in detention. Secondly, for my own personal wellbeing, I felt it best to engage in a living situation outside of the community. I understand the implications for commuting to and from the community and the resulting trade-offs. I understand I missed out on multiple contact hours and in turn much valuable data.

Language and Translation

Cross-language qualitative research also presents a number of methodological issues. The translation from one language to another can result in the loss of meaning, misrepresentation, and threaten overall validity (Esposito, 2001; Wong & Poon, 2010). First, when interviews are translated, they are not only interpreted by the researcher, but also first by the translator, threating validity. Secondly, idiomatic quality can be an issue as different words and phrases can have different meanings and carry varying levels of importance. Third, interpreters often are selective in the information (words and phrases) that are relayed. Even leaving out one word or one phrase from the original text or interview can influence how researchers interpret and represent the reality of participants (Murray & Wynne, 2001; Wong & Poon, 2010).

In order to mitigate the above issues, I used two local translators with excellent English abilities. Both were men in their early to mid-20s. One had studied English and American literature and had an extensive vocabulary, making him an excellent translator. The other spoke technically almost perfect English, but, at the same time, lacked personal knowledge of Western culture, making his translation less nuanced than the other translator. However, I found both exceptional.

Using local translators can have positive benefits, but some issues should be highlighted and considered. First, some issues may be sensitive to respondents, using translators can mean that individuals are less willing to share (Jacobsen, 2006). Second, the community became extremely divided at the end, and there was a general lack of trust. I found out later that I used a translator for an interview where he was not trusted by the participant. This lack of trust was new, as previously they had an excellent relationship. I missed this, however, and feel that the participant limited his responses because of this. Third, using local translators means using refugees. This means using individuals who are facing severe stresses on a daily basis. In addition, both of my translators worked and commuted for long hours. At times they were very tired.

Another issue was that of isolation, as was the case with Hayder and Nasir (mentioned above). They chose to cope by removing themselves completely from the community, thereby refusing interactions with other Arabic speakers. This meant that I could not conduct in-depth interviews, because of my inability to speak Arabic. However, I had formed some close ties with these individuals, and they agreed to help in my research, even though they would not let anyone translate for us. Due to this, with my rudimentary Arabic, and their rudimentary English, and the

use of google translate, we were able to spend time together conversing and I was able to collect a significant amount of data, even though in-depth interviews were not conducted.

Gender

Gaining a more holistic picture of the wellbeing strategies of the Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok would require inputs from the entire family. I often attempted to gain the perspective of women in the community. This was an extremely difficult task. For some groups it is common for women to opt out of participation, making it is difficult to gain a full picture of the refugee situation (Landau, 2004). In many of my experiences, women were much younger than their husbands, and would be less inclined to speak when their husbands were present. After forming bonds with some women, they would speak more, although not always the case. Women often would not want to show up their husbands by demonstrating superior English skills. For example, it was not until I had spent over one month with Amer and Rana's family did I even know Rana spoke English. This was the same situation with Faruk's wife, Ayda. Reema, on the other hand, spoke less than Ziad due to her insecurity about her English level, she spoke very freely with me after she gained confidence (her English was exceptional, and her insecurity unwarranted). Overall, the women did speak to me, and I was able to collect data and insights, however, they did not speak as freely with me as I would have liked for the sake of my research. However, one in depth interview was conducted with a woman head of household, Nadia. Nadia was much older than most of the women in which I interacted, and was very strong and ran her household. The interview with her did not differ drastically from the interviews I conducted with male heads of households.

Reliving Trauma

Interviewing refugees can result in the re-experiencing of trauma, and is a widely considered ethical concern (Dona, 2007; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Pittaway et al., 2010). Often the stories retold during interviews were relayed with devastating sadness. During the interviews they spoke of loss and a wide variety of emotions surged. Mitchell and Irvine (2008) submit that there is not necessarily a protocol in which to provide support in emotional interviews and that a number of responses can be appropriate. In order to respond to the issue of reliving trauma ethically and morally, I attempted to invoke listening skills and empathy. I spent many hours every week in the community and I believe that I was able to demonstrate my care and concern. I attempted to spend the last 15 minutes or more of an in-depth interview talking about positive aspects to ensure the continuation of hope, such as the impending future education and health care for their children. I asked them, in these last moments to discuss what they were the most

grateful for in this world and how they create happiness in their daily lives. I felt that focusing on these three factors, positive outcomes, gratitude, and positive coping that they were able to see themselves as resilient and moving forward. More often than not, participants expressed appreciation for their ability to share and my willingness to listen.

Secondary Trauma and Personal Wellbeing

It is common for trauma workers, those who work with survivors of trauma, to suffer psychological consequences from their work; many suffer from vicarious or secondary trauma (Cohen and Collens, 2012; Kjellenberg, et al., 2014; Lusk and Terrazas, 2015; Michalopoulos and Aparicio, 2012; Salston and Figley, 2003). Vicarious and secondary trauma are essentially caused when trauma workers feel and share the emotions of others, such as pain, fear, and anxiety (Kjellenberg, et al, 2014). As a result, they can, and often do, experience symptoms similar to survivors.

Symptoms can include sadness, anger, fear, terror, frustration, grief, helplessness, powerlessness, despair, rage, and shock (Cohen and Collens, 2013; Michalopoulos and Aparicio, 2012). Additionally, people can experience the inability to build trust, insomnia/sleeping problems, concentration impairment, irritability, distress from overwhelming feelings, isolation, and family dysfunction (Cohen and Collens, 2012; Kjellenberg, et al, 2014; Lusk and Terrazas, 2015). Trauma workers also experience 'emotional exhaustion, decreased self-esteem, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, reduced insight and reduced capacity of decision making' (Kjellenberg, et al, 2014: 121). Symptoms can also manifest physiologically and include headaches, nausea, hypertension, physical exhaustion, gastrointestinal problems, and recurrent colds (Kjellenberg, et al, 2014; Lusk and Terrazas, 2015; Salston and Figley, 2003). Vicarious trauma can even lead to long term changes to the individual, even causing people to become cynical and distrustful (Cohen and Collens, 2012; Kjellenberg, et al, 2014).

I had no idea of the extent of secondary or vicarious trauma until I found myself suffering immensely. Listening to stories of trauma, torture, death, and extreme forms of psychological and physical violence left me feeling hopeless, mistrustful, and even cynical. I found myself questioning the utility of my research when every day I was seeing the depths of human suffering at the IDC or in the homes of refugee families. For many months I could not sleep and moments would pass that seemed to come from nowhere when I could feel my heart beating harder in my chest, and I was barely able to breathe. I could not concentrate and I felt a deep sense of anger, sadness, and frustration. This had an impact on my positionality and my ability to work. I found myself unable to trust the words of others at face value. After a while this presented as

advantageous in some ways. I would write down the words of others assuming the information to be false until it could be further corroborated. This ended up being a helpful strategy as I was hearing many mutually exclusive rumours. Overall, I attempted to mitigate these symptoms through mediation, yoga, and talking with close friends. I started seeing a counsellor as well, and eventually I was able to sleep again.

3.3. Conclusion

In such precarious living situations, merely examining livelihood strategies is not sufficient to understand how individuals are able to survive and thrive. Therefore, a more holistic view of the lives and the context is necessary. This thesis explores and analyses the structural and institutional constraints that guide the decisions of individuals and the resulting wellbeing strategies. The lives of the refugees cannot be evaluated as a list of outcomes, such as income, health and education, as this process ignores aspects of culture, personal meaning, values and the overall subjective evaluation of the objective outcomes. For this reason, the concept of social wellbeing, including how individuals evaluate their level of wellbeing, provides the most appropriate means to analyse the outcomes that result from the structural constraints they face.

In order to do so I use thick description and interpretation, employing a number of qualitative methods in order to gain a deeper understanding. Participant observation generated the most data for this research, as I was able to take part in the daily lives of others. Interviews were used to supplement and clarify information. In-depth interviews gave participants the opportunity to describe their experiences at length and discuss how the experiences have affected them directly. These methods allowed for a holistic picture of the lives of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok, Thailand and how they strive to achieve and maintain wellbeing in the constrained context of Bangkok, Thailand.

However, it must be noted that many ethical considerations must be met in order to ensure that, not only do we '*do no harm*,' but do what we can to ensure that people are better off than they would be had we not come into their lives. This can be done through offering emotional support or helping to provide basic assistance when possible. Overall, we must not be afraid to engage in the lives of others; it is the only way we can truly develop a deep understanding of that which we did not previously understand.

Chapter 4 Understanding Wellbeing: Palestinian-Syrian Refugees

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to first build an understanding of that which Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok value most and is necessary for the achievement and maintenance of wellbeing. Second, this chapter analyses how these values influenced the decision to migrate to Bangkok, Thailand. This allows us to view forced migration as an overarching wellbeing strategy, where decisions were made based on capabilities and values.

The first part of this chapter identifies the values that must be realised for the achievement of objective, subjective, and relational wellbeing for Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok. This analysis will be the basis for understanding how values are reflected in both the decision to leave Syria and travel to Bangkok (Part II of this chapter), how the context has implications on the ability to achieve wellbeing (Chapter 5) and the ensuing trade-offs and strategies in which community members engage, based on the context (Chapter 6). Data for this chapter were collected during participant observation when daily conversations with individuals reflected their needs, hopes, dreams, and the despair caused by their current situation. This chapter is also based upon findings from in-depth interviews where individuals were asked what was needed to be well.

As discussed in Chapter 2, forced migration and refugee research tends to view migration as motivated by conflict alone, meaning that no other factors, such as capabilities or values contribute to the decision making process (Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013). However, this emphasis discounts personal agency as well as the role of structures in forced migration, and suggests that responses to conflict are automatic or merely fear based. In Part II of this chapter, I view the decision to flee Syria as part of a wellbeing process. I apply the understanding of societal and individual values, combined with capabilities, and demonstrate how those factors influenced the decision making process, answering what, who, why, where and how:

- What were the conditions in Syria that caused Palestinian-Syrians to consider fleeing?
- Who was willing and able to seek asylum outside of Syria?
- Why did people choose to migrate and what values mattered in the decision making process?
- Where were people able to go, how did they choose, and why?
- How did they get there?

4.1.1. The Refugee Experience

The refugee experience in refugee studies refers to the varying stages of migration and their consequences, as experienced by the individual (Ager, 2003: 2). Many variations of this framework exist, however, for this research, I will break down the 'refugee experience' into four main stages: 1) pre-flight, 2) flight, 3) temporary-settlement, and 4) resettlement (Ager, 2003). The purpose of using this framework, for this particular research, is to establish a timeline, or chronology, in order to compartmentalise the experience of the participants. It allows a lens in which to view values and wellbeing strategies in transition; as the context changes, so do priorities and strategies. This research mostly examines the first three stages. While the framework is useful for the purposes of this research, this framework is not perfect, nor universal in nature and many critiques of the frame work exist.

First, this framework does not reflect the timeline that all refugees face. For example, these stages/phases were first described by Keller (1975, as cited in Stein, 1981: 321) in *Uprooting and Social Change* and have been restructured by various academics over time. Keller's stages include '1) perception of a threat; 2) decision to flee; 3) the period of extreme danger and flight; 4) reaching safety; 5) camp behaviour; 6) repatriation, settlement or resettlement; 7) the early and late stages of resettlement; 8) adjustment and acculturation; and, 9) finally, residual states and changes in behaviour caused by the experience.' These phases are extremely specific and the framework expects a certain trajectory that is generally archaic. Ager's model, while is more general and more useful, still reflects a stereotypical refugee experience. Overall the experience can be far more complex including multiple stops, multiple attempts to travel, multiple instances of refoulement, and drastic changes in plans based on challenges and opportunities. However, for this particular community the four stages generally apply for most family members and is useful to establish a timeline.

Second, this framework places much emphasis on the experience of the individual, rather than considering the 'histories, beliefs, and values' which influence the experience within the context (Ager, 2003: 14). Summerfield (2003) points out that Western notions of the refugee experience reflect the understanding of the individual rather than the group, which may not be helpful for those from non-Western populations. In many societies, the self is seen situated within the group and not within the mind or consciousness. Summerfield also points out that relationships in the family and community tend to carry more weight than the feelings of the individual, making the focus of the framework irrelevant for many. In response to this critique, I examine the experience from both a collective and individualistic perspective, building an understanding around the collective values and individual capabilities and aspirations that drive the experience.

Third, Watters (2008) points out that it is problematic to suggest that experiences in the past determine current circumstances; this emphasis disregards agency and resilience. By suggesting that all refugees face similar challenges and react in a similar manner, establishing a trajectory is overly simplistic and disregards both collective and individual strategies (Watters, 2008). This model therefore, lends support to the idea that refugees are helpless victims, something this research has shown to be untrue. The model suggests that refugees are forced from their homes and neglects aspects of the political economy, migration networks, and the social and cultural implications. In response, I do not use the framework in which to describe behaviour and choices, but to paint a picture of the context in which people find themselves.

Overall, the framework is used in order to establish a basic timeline and shed light on some of the experiences in which individuals and families engage. It helps build an understanding of this particular community as their path had a similar chronology where members were attempting to achieve wellbeing. The cycle will vary depending on the group and could depend on the context. The framework allows us to see the factors that come into play at different times that influence the decision making process, showing what strategies were needed in order to be well.

For these particular families the four stages are described below:

In *pre-flight*, people's lives are disrupted, both socially and economically. Individuals and groups face physical violence and, very often, political oppression. In this stage children are often kept from school, there is commonly a shift in social norms, and people regularly experience food shortages and economic hardships. Living conditions are often difficult and family members could be killed or arrested. Individuals might also be subjected to, or become victims of, extreme acts of violence. High levels of stress and anxiety are extremely common as a result of the experiences of the pre-flight stage (Ager, 2003). While this is a general description, the families in this research described similar experiences. Schools had closed, their homes were bombed, family members were hurt and killed, people were living in over-crowded homes, and exposure to violence was a fairly regular occurrence.

The *flight* phase involves separation, passage, and reception. Separation often means leaving behind family, culture, and a way of life. This separation from culture is acknowledged as having negative psychological effects and termed 'cultural bereavement' (Ager, 2003: 8). The families in this study left behind accomplishments, businesses, and many even lost the value of their skill sets as they became inapplicable in Bangkok. During passage refugees are vulnerable, subject to violence and mistreatment, and often flee using dangerous forms of transportation. During the

reception phase refugees are subject to refoulement (expulsion or return), fear of refoulement, and exploitation.

During the *temporary-settlement* phase individuals and families, in camps or in cities, are often faced with harsh conditions. Many heavily rely on the NGO or UN community (Ager, 2003). During the resettlement phase individuals are either repatriated, integrated into society, or sent to a third country of resettlement. Here, refugees face innumerable challenges while attempting to adapt, integrate, reintegrate, or assimilate. Families in Bangkok were waiting to be resettled in third countries, unable to legally work or access education, all while living in fear of arrest and refoulement.

The *resettlement* phase is not examined critically in this research as refugee families had yet to resettle outside of Thailand. However, 'resettlement' is a phase that is constantly discussed by families. It is a concept that fills them with both hope and dread.

4.1.2. Wellbeing, Values, and Forced Migration

The earliest refugee research describes refugees as differing from migrants as they are pushed from their land, rather than pulled (Stein, 1981). Immigrants/migrants are often thought of as poor and seeking economic opportunities in a new country. Refugees, on the other hand, are seen as lacking all choice. Stein proposed that refugees can be divided into two groups: 'anticipatory' and 'acute'. The anticipatory group senses trouble before conflict starts and makes plans to move before the subsequent danger. This group is therefore seen as similar to voluntary migrants; families move together and they bring resources. Acute refugees 'result from an overwhelming push' such as war or crisis and often move in mass with others due to fear or in attempt to survive (Stein, 1981: 322). According to Stein, the destination is mostly irrelevant for both voluntary and acute refugees.

More recent research suggests that refugees are first and foremost motivated to exodus by fear, however, other factors and conditions were taken into consideration (Ferris, 1993). According to Ferris's (1993) research, refugees leave their homes due to the exposure to actual violence; perceived, anticipated, or rumoured violence; the inability to leave before the violence occurs; and economic factors. Similarly, Richmond (1993) suggests that migration, including forced migration, comes down to multiple factors, and decisions to flee can be both reactive and proactive.

To date, limited research has been conducted on the decision making process in the pre-flight phase or the experience of the flight itself. The vast majority of pre-flight and flight migration

research focuses specifically on conflict and traumatic events, overlooking the aspects of wellbeing, agency, and values (Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013; De Haene et al., 2007; Derluyn et al., 2012). Further, much research fails to make the connection among trauma faced during pre-flight, flight, and post flight, and how these stressors 'may aggravate existing stressors' and reinforce trauma through a 'repetitive cycle' (De Haene et al., 2007: 273). Traumatic experiences in the first two phases of the refugee experience impact coping abilities and increase the risk of mental illness (Thomas, et al., 2011). Understanding the difficulties they have encountered in the first two phases will also provide some insight into how stress and trauma impact the wellbeing strategies in which individuals will later engage.

4.2. Part I – Values

Values, as defined in the conceptual framework, are goals, ordered by importance, which guide us to 'evaluate events, people, and actions' (Fischer and Schwartz (2011: 1128). Values help determine responsibilities, position thinking and logic, motivate aspirations, and guide actions (Featherstone, 2011; Fischer and Schwarz, 2011; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004; Rohan, 2000). The values that individuals and societies possess will greatly influence what is required to achieve wellbeing, in both need and action.

The core values that the Palestinian-Syrian community possessed were generally common across all families, reflecting societal construction based on the following: being Palestinians in exile, Palestinians from Syria, Muslim, and Arab. However, some subtle differences came to light during the analysis which demonstrated the personal construction of values and aspirations. These differences were based on personality, experiences, and other attributes such as age, marital status, and gender.

Age seemed to create the most distinct divisions between groups that I was able to identify. Previous research shows that Arabic families commonly face inter-generational divides, especially when it comes to ideas regarding gender roles and the interpretation of the Quran (Rasmi and Daly, 2016; Rasmi et al., 2014) For example, my research demonstrates the way in which religion came to play in every day decision making and how it varied by older and younger adults. For younger generations the Quran was less of a rulebook on how to live virtuously, and more of a general guideline and a source of strength. Ultimately, strict adherence to the Quran was not as vital for younger generations. My research also shows that young single men, as well as young married men and women without children, were more focused on their individual successes, whereas those who had children were the most concerned for their children and their children's opportunities.

Gender was also a factor that contributed to a variation in the values and capabilities of this group. Women play distinct roles in society and were therefore faced a different set of expectations and options (this will be discussed in depth below and in Chapter 6). For example, women could not travel alone, whereas men of all ages could. While some this dimension is examined to the extent possible, differentiation based on gender was not well explored in this research due to a lack of data. However, one major finding shows, as will be discussed below, that expectations for women resulted in limited capabilities.

Other attributes such as class and income would most definitely play a role in determining values and capabilities. However, for this research, this particular group is comprised of a similar socioeconomic class and are mostly considered middle class. Therefore, deeper analysis into strategies based on class was not possible.

4.2.1. Palestinian-ness and Identity

The values of the Palestinian-Syrian community are deeply rooted within a shared Palestinian identity, or 'Palestinian-ness.' While only one individual in the community had ever even been within the borders of Palestine, being Palestinian was still the prevailing identity for every community member. Palestinian-ness is described as shared memories and experiences of displacement and statelessness, constructed through shared narratives, based on kinship ties and culture (Doumani, 2007; Fincham, 2010). Palestinian-ness allows for the identification with the Arab and Muslim culture, but the shared narratives create a distinct identity among other Arabs. For example, while families did describe themselves as Arabic, they were first and foremost Palestinian and often described what sets them apart from other Arabs and Middle Eastern culture.

> Damascus was nothing before Palestinians arrived. Palestinians are good business people and are well educated.
> - Ziad

> Palestinians are strong and resilient; we have been through many things and can handle any situation, more than other Arabs.
> - Mohammed

Palestinians are proud people and have coped with exile through focusing on their accomplishments and ability to survive (Fincham, 2010). The shared narratives of trauma and exclusion, alongside accounts of strength and re-emergence, allowed for members of the Palestinian community to identify as being resilient and perhaps better equipped to face any challenge. The narrative essentially read: Palestinians in Syria were not only able to pick

themselves up from where they had been forced down, but were also better educated and more successful than most Syrians, who had never faced the challenges which Palestinians had suffered.

Prior to the conflict, while living in Syria, the distinction between being Palestinian versus being Syrian was less pronounced. When Palestinians lived in Syria they felt that they belonged there and felt that they were treated well, especially when comparing their situation to that of the Palestinian situation in Lebanon or in the West Bank and Gaza. However, after the conflict began, Palestinian-Syrians began to see themselves as less Syrian, some even felt rejected from Syria, reinforcing their identification with being Palestinian. After fleeing Syria, no Palestinian-Syrians thought of themselves as Syrian, and many tended to separate themselves from other Syrians (non-Palestinians) by mostly living in different communities.

> They treated us well. I was an employee for the government for 24 years, so they treated us well… Now, it changed now because I left Syria and the government has said many things about the Palestinians, they do not like us, they do not treat us like before. They stop employing Palestinians and now we can no longer own property, it is a new law. They are just trying to say to us 'go out and find a new place to live.'
> - Amer

> Nowadays I cannot feel like I am Syrian. Some Syrian people now hate us. Some of us got involved [in the crisis], so ok. But, before, no one, for 25 years, no one reminded me that I was Palestinian and not Syrian, even in schools and universities and work.
> - Ziad

> I did not feel Syrian [before], but I did not feel like a refugee. You could go anywhere in the country that you wanted, they treated us like Syrians except for elections. We weren't really foreigners or refugees…We say we are Palestinian now, and all Palestinians are proud to be Palestinians, and I don't know why because, of all the Palestinians [in Bangkok] now, only my aunt's husband was ever in Palestine… They are just proud.
>
> - Ibrahim

Ibrahim's comment reflects the realignment with Palestinian pride and Palestinian-ness. However, as noted above, part of the Palestinian identity encompasses a sense of statelessness, which had become more pronounced due to the constant daily reminders of being without a nationality.

> Where should the Palestinians go now? No one accepts Palestinians now. All the Arab countries reject to give a visa to Palestinians, it is difficult for us to go anywhere.
> - Amer

> Here [in Bangkok], I am still Palestinian, but I am a refugee.
> - Ibrahim

In turn, this aspect of statelessness left many feeling a renewed sense of solidarity with Palestinians world-wide. This camaraderie and solidarity was often demonstrated by words and action in the community. Members of the community in Bangkok attended Palestinian Solidarity Campaign meetings and community members regularly spoke of their plight as Palestinians.

> I am Palestinian, it is my duty to protest and to speak up and defend other Palestinians.
> - Ibrahim

In response to the Israeli airstrikes over the Gaza Strip in July 2014, nearly 100 members of the Palestinian-Syrian refugee community joined a protest in front of the Israeli embassy in Bangkok. Many families brought their children. This was dangerous for the community for two reasons. First, Thailand was still under martial law since the military take-over of the government in May 2014, and any public protests were deemed illegal. Secondly, the community members did not have valid visas, which meant they could be arrested at any time. This indicated a strong identification with Palestinian-ness and Palestinian solidarity.

Overall, research on identity and wellbeing shows that collective identity tends to be positively correlated with psychological wellbeing (Dimitrova et al., 2013; Iwamoto and Liu, 2010; Smith and Silva, 2011; Suh, 2002). Evidence also suggests, though, that adhering strongly to ethnic or collective identity does not necessarily mitigate stress, especially in migrant communities, and may contribute to increase stress caused by ethnic discrimination (Smith and Silva, 2011). This type of adherence can be detrimental to psychological wellbeing when immigrant populations attempt to acculturate (Kim et al., 2014). However, in this particular community, the maintaining of identity was seen as crucial as many Palestinians derive their dignity and strength from being Palestinian.

4.2.2. Dignity and Honour

> To deprive an Arab of his dignity is to transform his life into a worthless pursuit
> (Ayish, 1998: 40).

Palestinian culture, as is consistent with Arab culture in general, is considered an ‘honour culture’ (Hunt, 2008; Rasmi et al., 2014). In this sense dignity is derived through the personal view of the self and honour is derived through the views of others. How others view the individual is based upon the societal values and codes in place, and those who fail to conform to these societal values and codes will bring shame to their family (Hunt, 2008; Rasmi et al., 2014; Hattar-Pollara and Meleis, 1995). For example, if a male head of household cannot feed himself

and his family, he will not only be looked down upon by society, losing his honour, but also feel a strong sense of shame, losing his dignity.

In Palestinian and Arab cultures, as a patriarchal culture, honour is often considered to be 'a male value because it is through its men that a family relates with the wider world' (Hunt, 2008: 877). In Palestinian culture men must protect their families, especially the women in the family, or risk losing face. Therefore, maintaining honour, which is obtained through the perceptions and judgement of others, and resulting dignity, which is an internal assessment based on honour, are of the highest priorities for Palestinian men, especially married men. This could be seen in the community as community members spoke of dignity regularly and the desire to live dignified lives. According to interviews, a man maintains dignity through taking care of his family, having control of his own life, standing up for himself, and being seen as strong and not easily manipulated.

> The only life worth living is a dignified life, where you do not have to rely on others to survive.
> - Ahmad

This idea of dignity, where men must stand on their own two feet and support others was such a significant value in Palestinian-Syrian community that, for some, it took precedence over other aspects of life. For example, for many it was said to be better to starve than to ask for assistance.

> A beggar has no dignity in our culture.
> - Ziad

In this sense, begging was a last resort for most men as they would lose honour and dignity. Activities that may have otherwise been deemed immoral would be preferred over begging, for example, stealing and extortion, lying, or working in illicit businesses. If a family did have to rely on hand-outs, they would often down play or even lie about how much and how often they received donations. However, whether or not a man is married and has children, would also impact whether or not he would engage in perceived immoral or illicit work.

> It is better to do this kind of work than to beg. A man cannot beg in our culture.
> - Ibrahim

> Young men can do this kind of work. I cannot, I have children.
> - Mohammed

While demonstrating honour and maintaining dignity is important for men in the patriarchal Arab culture, women also work hard to help their families maintain honour and dignity. Females, for example, must strictly adhere to gender codes or risk bringing shame to the family (Glazer &

Ras, 1994; Ismail, 2012; Rapoport et al., 1989; Rasmi et al., 2014). In the Palestinian-Syrian community, it was common for women to let their husbands talk, even when women spoke English more fluently than men.

Box 4.1 Letting Their Husbands Speak

Once I went to the flat where Amer and Rana lived and was trying to explain something important to Amer. I tried explaining in about three different ways, using different English and rudimentary Arabic vocabulary along with a number of hand gestures, engaging in a somewhat frantic game of charades. Finally, Rana walked over from around the corner, where she had been waiting patiently, and said, in perfect English, "Of course, let's go." I just stood there shocked, wide-eyed. After 8 months of working with the family, I never knew Rana spoke English as she always let her husband speak.

In addition, most women did not interrupt or correct their husbands. Ahmad, for example, had a tendency to tell and retell stories that did not necessarily reflect the truth. I began to notice this as each time he told a story he would change significant aspects of the same story, changing who was involved, where, and when. His wife, Abeer, sat and listened and never interrupted or contradicted, even when the stories were about her or when they made her look weak or foolish, reflecting her adherence to the gender code as an important value for their family.

For younger community members, roughly 18 to late 20s, especially those living away from their parents and for those with no children, the cultural code and strict adherence was less pronounced. For example, during interviews, Reema regularly corrected Ziad and supplied her opinion, which he respected even if he did not agree. In addition, Ibrahim regularly mentioned that he did not like to see unfair relationships or how women were over-worked in the community. This inter-generational gap in Arab communities is commonly associated with differences in opinion based on gender, religion, family expectations, and risky behaviour such as alcohol and drugs (Rasmi and Daly, 2016; Rasmi et al., 2014). Overall, how dignity was achieved may have varied slightly by community member, but was a key value and extremely important to wellbeing.

4.2.3. Strength and Suffering

Part of living a dignified life, as a Palestinian, lies in being seen as strong and resilient in the face of suffering. A narrative exists that allows for Palestinians to see themselves as suffering more than other groups. Fincham (2010: 126) describes the narratives around the collective suffering of Palestinians 'as an identity marker.'

> By taking up their suffering, Palestinians reinforce the essence of their 'Palestinian-ness' and mark the difference between themselves and 'Others'. In this way, Palestinian identity is unified and strengthened through adversity (Fincham, 2010: 127).

As mentioned above, this particular Palestinian community had begun to reinforce its Palestinian-ness as they felt separated from Syria and feelings of statelessness had become predominant. This reinforced identity included shared narratives of suffering. This was regularly seen in the community through their descriptions of how Palestinians all over the world had suffered, according to them, the worst atrocities imaginable. Even Palestinian-Syrians who had never been to Palestine, and grew up comfortably in Syria, would describe the struggles that they faced as perhaps the worst the world has ever seen. This was often reflected in their views of their current situation.

> No one has faced what we have had to face. We have it worse than anyone; all other people at least have a country to go back to.
> – Nadia

> Have you ever heard of a group of people in the world that have been stateless for generations?
> – Ziad

The answer to Ziad's question was always, "yes, there are many people like you in the world." Here I would begin to cite multiple stateless groups that had been lacking any form of protection for decades longer than Palestinians. His response would be, "no, no, they are not like us," and the conversation would end. To believe something contradictory would affect their dignity, identity, and personal narrative. For this reason, the narrative was reinforced time and again within the community.

4.2.4. Religion

While Palestinians do see themselves as a unified culture they also identify as being Muslim and being Arab, sharing values and culture with Muslims and Arabs (Fincham, 2010). Palestinians living in exile 'value Muslim identity because it unites them with the global Muslim community and gives them a sense of religious and cultural solidarity with others' (Fincham, 2010: 137). Community members, even children as young as six and seven, would speak to me about God and how Islam was an important part of their everyday lives. Fatima, Mohammed, Reema, Ahmad, Abeer, and Iman often explained to me that God was the most significant part of their lives and that they found their strength by trusting in God and his plan.

Islam is more than a religion or faith for the majority of Arabs. It is a 'complete way of life' where virtuous actions are considered acts of worship (Ayish, 1998: 38). For this reason, following the

teachings of the Quran was seen as one of the most vital aspects of being Muslim for almost all members of the Palestinian-Syrian community. This includes actions such as praying, eating halal, honouring your family and spouse, and for most women, wearing the hijab. Nasir, for example, would often talk at length about the merits of Islam and how his daily actions were dictated by the religion. According to Nasir, he modelled his life, as closely as was possible, after the Prophet Muhammad.

> The Prophet helped his wife in the kitchen, so I help my wife in the kitchen. It is important to be like Muhammad
> – Nasir

During the day, the majority of community members prayed several times per day. They often left me to pray in another room or prayed in front of me if no other room was available, not wanting to miss any of the five daily prayers while I was there. Since I would spend long days with families I would often see them stop to pray three or four times. Some would postpone their prayers until after I had left when I first began to visit, but after a few visits they would interrupt interviews and conversations to pray.

When locked in the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) with their children, Abeer and Iman would skip meals if nothing halal was available. The food there was particularly sparse, and most detainees did not have enough to eat on a daily basis, but many Palestinian detainees would forgo the small amount of food available, rather than consume food that was not halal.

> I did not eat yesterday because there was no halal food here.
> – Abeer

Many Palestinian-Syrians in Thailand had light skin and would likely be able to pose as typical Australian, European, or North American tourists if they dressed more Western or if the women did not wear the hijab. However, the majority of married women chose to wear the hijab even though it drew more attention from the immigration police. Women, such as Reema, saw it as a sign of respect for her husband and family and would not change.

> I think it would be easier to fit in here if I did not put on the hijab, but I have chosen to wear it and will continue to wear it.
> - Reema

The above shows that religion was so crucial to the daily lives of most members of the community that they would forgo food and increased security in order to practice their faith through daily activities. Other community members, mostly young people and those without children, placed less emphasis on religion and did not adhere closely to all of the teachings of

the Quran. Ibrahim and Ziad, and the majority of single men, did not concern themselves with regular prayer. They tended to dress in a very Western style, often in shorts and T-shirts. Ziad referred to himself as 'religious but secular' as he believed in the teachings of the Quran, but did 'not follow all of the rules all of the time.' For both Ziad and Ibrahim, religion and piety should be based on the treatment of others, not just going through the motions. Many of the other young, single men in the community deviated further from the teaching of the Quran and drank alcohol, smoked marijuana, had Thai and non-Muslim girlfriends, and visited Thai night clubs.

While practices and beliefs varied by individual, overall, religion generally factored in to the values system and priorities of the entire community. Not only was the right to practice their religion and religious freedom important to the families, believing and trusting in God, was also a significant coping mechanism that many had carried throughout their lives.

4.2.5. Family

The concept of family is extremely important in Arabic culture. The family is considered the centre of society and family members are obliged to support and also rely on one another (Ayish, 1998; Britto and Amer, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2014). For this reason, families in the community were expected to sacrifice for, stand up for, and financially support one another. It was the responsibility of the entire family to help others achieve and maintain wellbeing. Many examples of this practice included living illegally in Thailand with their families and enduring the associated hardships when they had opportunities to live elsewhere, receiving money from family members from abroad, and dropping everything to care for a family member in need. Families also valued living in proximity. Most families, when interviewed said that being with their families was what they needed to be well.

> I need my family to be close.
> – Ahmad
>
> A good life is being close to my family.
> – Amer
>
> When I see my wife, and we are in our own world, everything is fine.
> – Ziad
>
> Family is the most important thing. Without family, there is nothing
> – Mohammed

Arabic families can be described as 'extended, patriarchal and endogamous' (Ayish, 1998: 35). Families are extended in the sense that cousins and nieces, and nephews are considered part of the family and are treated as a high priority. Families are extremely patriarchal and men and

women have very specific roles. Men are expected to be the main breadwinners and have the final say on all family decisions and women are meant to take care of the home (Rapaport et al., 1989; Rasmi et al., 2014). Finally, families are endogamous as Palestinians tend to marry other Palestinians or other Sunnis and do not tend to inter-marry with other religions or ethnic groups; however, this does occur from time to time.

> Men take care of their family outside of the home, and women take care of their family inside the home. Strong women can do both.
> – Mohammed

This is a crucial part of maintaining dignity and wellbeing. Men are meant to take care of the family from an economic perspective and also meant to protect their family from harm. Women, on the other hand, take care of the family from the inside, including cooking meals, dressing children well, making sure they do well in school and are learning, and disciplining children. In the community, while it was generally seen as acceptable for 'strong women' to work outside of the home, as long as she was simultaneously providing for the family inside the home, it was not acceptable for a man to rely on his wife for economic support or for any form of protection. Chapter 6 shows that these above aspects had a major impact on the ability to achieve and maintain wellbeing in Bangkok, for both men and women.

4.2.6. Education

For Palestinians, both in historical Palestine and in exile, education is seen as a fundamental aspect of being Palestinian, thus Palestinians strive to obtain the highest level of education possible (Abu Lughod, 1973; Davies, 1979; Rihan, 2001; Rosenfeld, 2002). The high value placed on educational attainment is thought to have developed as an economic survival tactic as an education can withstand shocks and uncertainties (Davies, 1979; Rihan, 2001). In addition, education was seen as way in which Palestinians could preserve their culture and identity and develop and sustain a resistance movement, even in exile (Bruhn, 2006; Rosenfeld 2002). This emphasis on education has resulted in Palestinians as one of the most educated groups within the Arab world (Rosenfeld, 2002). This was a major source of pride in the community.

The importance of education was discussed on a daily basis in the homes of Palestinian-Syrians:

> Education is important for us, for all Palestinians, more than any other Arab group.
> - Abeer

> We attended the UN schools, it is a better education than the Syrians receive.
> - Ziad

This was a common sentiment in the community. Families would regularly identify themselves as having received more and better education than most other Arabs, especially Syrians, who were portrayed as a group which was happy with the status quo. Families would often discuss their education levels or the technical skills they had obtained and repeatedly told me what level of education each member of the family had obtained.

The importance of education was also reflected during all six in-depth interviews. When asked what were the most critical aspects needed to attain 'a good life,' all six interviewees mentioned education for the children and grandchildren and for themselves. Ziad and Reema even discussed the education of the children they hoped to have, and how it would be crucial once they did have children. Fatima also believed that education, only after Islam, was the single most important thing for her children, as well as for her and her husband. She believed education would lead to good jobs and economic stability. Fatima often talked about continuing her studies in Holland, their destination country. Similarly, Ibrahim and Ziad often discussed their desire to obtain a master's degree and maybe eventually a PhD.

The Palestinian Syrian community identified with high levels of education, both individually and collectively. It was a source of pride and identity, something that must be accessible in order to achieve wellbeing. The lack of education opportunities in Bangkok, especially for their children, was a major impediment to achieving wellbeing.

4.2.7. Feeling Part of a Community

> Between the individual and his family there is an obligation of mutual support, and between the individual and his society there is a bond of co-operation for the benefit of the whole and the protection and well-being of the individual (Ayish, 1998: 39).

Having a sense of community is important to the Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Thailand, as is the case for most refugees (Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, 2013). Palestinian-Syrians reported that they needed to be supported and understood, have people they can talk to, and that they need to feel welcomed.

> When you can share with someone, and they know how you feel, it makes you feel better, more calm. It is very important, but I can't explain it, you just have to know it.
> - Fatima

Being able to live in harmony with the community and having trust was seen as necessary to live a good life for all community members. Palestinian-Syrians in the community also desired a space in which to share culture, including food and customs. Having this social space was seen as an essential aspect for wellbeing for every community member, especially older generations who were less interested in engaging with new cultures or new communities.

At the same time, younger refugees, such as Ziad and Ibrahim, were interested in learning about other cultures and building connections outside of the Palestinian-Syrian community. Younger refugees enjoyed spending time with refugees from other countries, other immigrants and migrants, and the local Thai community. Ziad, Reema, and Ibrahim all wanted to live in countries where they could engage with Western culture, which they thought would help them to learn and grow as people.

> Diversity and acceptance are very important to me. I think Westerners are more open, and I want to be understood. I want to be able to share ideas; our culture is too closed.
> – Ziad

> I want to live in America and engage in the American culture. It is not that I don't want to be Palestinian, but I want to establish a new life and move on from the past.
> – Ibrahim

4.2.8. Opportunities and Freedoms

> Public perceptions of a person's dignity [are] decisive in shaping the individual's self-esteem. (Ayish, 1998: 40).

While Palestinian-Syrians prioritise collectivism, as derived from both Arabic and Islamic culture and traditions, obtaining individual goals and having access to rights are significant aspects as well (Ayish, 1998). Overall, dignity also means personal achievement. In Palestinian culture individuals feel it necessary to obtain a good education and achieve a certain level of success. This is partly because of the desire to be financially stable and care for their families, but also to be productive members of society, and being seen as such in the community is critical.

> Having ambition is important. You don't just stop your life when you achieve one goal. That is not good.
> – Ziad

Due to the lack of opportunities and freedoms throughout their lives, Palestinian-Syrians placed much emphasis on a number of basic rights such as the right to free speech, the right to travel, and the right to have a nationality. For those with children, it was crucial that their children have access to opportunities and rights.

> I want my grandchildren to have a nationality.
> – Nadia

During all six interviews and during my many visits to the Immigration Detention Centre, parents said that the entire experience of coming to Thailand, even amid immense suffering, was worth it because they were opening opportunities for their children that they would never have had otherwise. Even Ziad and Reema talked about the opportunities they were providing for the children they would have in the future.

For Ziad, Ibrahim, and other young men, having the opportunities to experience the world, to learn from other cultures, to participate in politics, and to obtain good jobs, were seen as highly desirable.

> I want to join a political party. I have a lot to say and I have been keeping it inside for so many years.
> – Ziad

> I want to study and then get a good job. I want to make money so that I can give back to the community. There are so many people who need help.
> – Ibrahim

Dignity, religious freedom, family, education, a sense of community, and the opportunity to achieve goals and aspirations were the most crucial elements for Palestinian-Syrian refugees to achieve and maintain wellbeing. Building an understanding of what this particular group valued allows us to view wellbeing strategies and understand the outcomes and processes. As an outcome, understanding values tells us what people need to be well and how they subjectively assess their own situation. For example, if a person or a community greatly values education, a lack of education could make the community worse off as compared to another community that places a lower value on education attainment. Further, seeing wellbeing as a process, this analysis of values provides insight into motivations and behaviours. For example, a community that places a high value on the future may take more risks to provide opportunities for their families than communities or groups who are more present moment focused.

Overall, these values are not independent of one another, and indeed are overlapping and connected, providing a holistic picture of what is necessary to be well. These values influence and are influenced by the decisions refugees make on a daily basis, including the choice to seek asylum.

4.3. Part II – Asylum Seeking as a Wellbeing Strategy (Pre-Flight and Flight)

Viewing wellbeing as a process, this section will help demonstrate the varying aspects of decision making for Palestinian-Syrians as they were deciding to flee Syria. Conflict is not the only driver of forced migration and much more needs to be understood to determine whether or not migration can or will take place. Taking into account the values and aspirations listed above, this section looks at the early stages of the refugee experience and builds an understanding of the drivers in decision making. This chapter analyses how the decision to flee Syria and come to Thailand fits within the wellbeing framework – analysing migration as objective, subjective, and relational, by considering capabilities and values.

4.3.1. What were the Conditions?

The majority of Palestinian-Syrian families who fled Syria for Bangkok were living in the Yarmouk camp in Damascus, Syria. 'Camp' is a lose term used to describe the 2.1 square km area where Palestinians first settled in Syria after fleeing Palestine. Ultimately it is an informal or unofficial camp of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that has been inhabited by Palestinian refugees since its establishment 1957. It was, according to interviewees, a bustling commercial district, a well-organised and densely populated place. Palestinians in Syria were not legally confined to refugee camps as Palestinians are in Lebanon, however over 100,000 of the nearly 500,000 Palestinian refugees residing in Syria lived in the camp.

The Yarmouk camp first came under attack in late July 2012, where it faced intermittent violence until the most violent of attacks occurred on August 3, 2012 when the government army entered the camp, killing 20 and injuring 65 (Holmes, 2012). According to both Mohammed and media reports, the attacks continued for weeks, displacing 1,000s within Syria and pushing more than 600 Palestinian-Syrians out of Syria and into Lebanon (Al Arabiya, 2012; IOM, 2012). From August until December 2012, the violence in the Yarmouk camp continued. Large attacks were sporadic, but shelling became consistent. One of the larger attacks took place in November, killing 45 (Zarzar, 2012).

The Palestinian-Syrian community, much like the rest of the Syrian population, had no unifying political standing. Support was divided among the government and free army, while others remained neutral. When the conflict began in 2011, as Palestinians are not citizens and cannot vote, Syrians saw Palestinians as outside of the conflict. According to Ziad, in summer 2011 he and his family took a holiday outside of Damascus. The Syrian army knocked on the door of the vacation home where they were staying and asked for their identification. Upon seeing that they were Palestinian, the soldier stated that they were not looking for Palestinians as the current conflict did not concern them, but wanted information on the whereabouts of the landlord who was Syrian.

This notion had clearly shifted by December 2012 when the siege on the Yarmouk camp began (Chulov, 2012; UNOCHA, 2012). Fighting broke out on December 5th, conflicting reports place blame on both sides for initiating violence, but what is made clear is that both sides engaged in attacks, and by December 16th, the escalating violence resulted in an air force assault on the camp. As a result, roughly 75 per cent of the residents of the Yarmouk camp had fled (McDonnell and Bulos, 2012; Zarzar and Mashi, 2012).

Box 4.2 Ahmad and Abeer – Yarmouk Camp Siege

Due to the attacks that began at the end of July and the beginning of August 2012, Ahmad and his family left the Yarmouk camp temporarily and stayed at his sister's house for roughly ten days. When things calmed down slightly, he returned to the camp, hoping it would be safe enough.

Even after the air force strike on December 16th, Ahmad did not want to leave the Yarmouk camp. He had four children, the youngest, his daughter Maysa, was less than two years old and his wife was pregnant. He was worried for their safety, but felt if they left the camp they would lose the camp to the fighters and be forced out forever.

> On December 18th the bombing continued still and I tried to stay. You can imagine with each attack on my street I felt like my heart is made of glass and could break at any time. So I could not forget December 18th, the biggest air attack on my own street. But it was when I saw the fighters on the 24th of December that I knew we had to go out.

With snipers in houses and fighters on the ground, Ahmad and Abeer prepared to leave the Yarmouk camp. They made an agreement with one another before they walked out the door, "If I fall down, don't look back and keep going, no matter what, and I will do the same." They told the children that if mom or dad falls down, it was because they were tired and going to take a nap, but the children had to keep going without them. The older children, Maysr 13 and Tarek 12 knew better, but acted like they believed them anyway.

Ahmad loaded his children into a discarded cart, covered them with pans from the house, and pushed them through the camp, a terrifying 5-minute walk. They went to the right at first but a mortar bomb exploded. He turned the cart to go the other direction, but encountered a soldier, of which side Ahmad could never be sure. The soldier fired shots into the air, Ahmad surmised that the scene of a man pushing a cart with four children inside confused the soldier which is why he did not shoot the family directly. They then came upon a van that had been shot repeatedly, all the passengers were dead and there was blood spilling out of the van. They told the children that a soldier had killed a cow which caused the ensuing blood to run out of the van. The older children, of course, did not believe them. Ahmad was able to push the cart out of Yarmouk camp and they went to his sister's house where it was safer, for a while.

The story in box 4.2 reveals that escalating violence had forced the displacement of the families who were living in the Yarmouk camp. Even those determined to stay, such as Ahmad, were forced out of their homes in order to survive. The majority of people who stayed behind were young men hoping to defend their houses from both sides of the conflict, although some families remained. Those individuals who stayed behind became trapped in the Yarmouk camp, many for over a year, due to fighting. At this point many homes had been bombed and/or flattened, the schools and hospitals were closed, and fighting had taken over the streets. Essentially their neighbourhood had become a war zone.

4.3.2. Who Could Stay and Who Could Travel - Capabilities and Values

As things were becoming progressively worse for Palestinians in Syria, most were faced with a choice of whether to stay or to leave Syria. Clearly, not everyone could or would leave Syria, and

the decision making process would be easier for some rather than others. The first question was a matter of both values and capabilities; essentially, *is it possible to leave?*

Mobility **–** First, those who did not flee the Yarmouk camp soon after the siege were trapped inside, surrounded by both the government and the free army and would not be able to leave the camp, let alone the country for some time. For those individuals and families there was no immediate option to flee.

Housing and internal displacement – According to UNHCR (Global Focus), at the time of writing, over half of Syria's population had been forced from their homes, making alternate housing options difficult to find. Following the Yarmouk camp siege, the majority of areas in the country were unsafe. There were, at this time, areas in Damascus and some parts of the country that were considered relatively safe, according to the families. However, rent in these areas had gone up 500 per cent or more since the beginning of the conflict. Only if families had savings or still had paid employment, would they be able to pay the substantial rents. Otherwise, they might be lucky enough to have family members residing in these safe areas and would be able to stay with them. One of the only alternatives would be to leave Syria in search for safe housing.

Crossing the border and refugee camps – As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is difficult for Palestinians to cross into bordering countries. Even for those who were able to successfully do so, most cities in neighbouring countries (if they allow refugees to reside there) are much more expensive than Damascus, making accommodation unaffordable. Refugee camps would therefore be the only option. The refugee camps were known for their deplorable conditions. This kept many from crossing the borders into Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Cost – Traveling outside of the region is relatively expensive, and only those of middle class and above economic standings could afford to travel. According to all families interviewed, the cost of travel to Bangkok for each person, including visa fees was approximately 2,000 USD[12]. In order to afford this, refugees must be affluent and have money saved. Otherwise they would need to be educated and feel that they would have transferable skills and be able to earn immediately after arrival. If neither was the case then a refugee would have to have support networks in place in Bangkok or have family members who were willing to support them from abroad.

Gender – The refugees in the Bangkok community consist mainly of young single men (18-25) who have travelled alone and families. No young single/childless women had travelled from

[12] The most up to date World Bank data for Syria suggests that the GDP per capita (2007) was 2,066 USD.

Syria alone, and I never came across single mothers or married women with children without a man to accompany them. Therefore, some social and cultural values limited who could travel and who could not.

Identity and culture – Finally, after many interviews and interactions with others in the community I learned that many, especially older generations would not think of leaving Syria. Ziad, when talking about his parents and their generation, said, "they cannot live outside Syria, even with the war. They adore Syria."

> I keep thinking that if I got a better job I could bring my family here to safety, but they won't leave. My mom loves Syria; she will never leave.
> – Ibrahim

For some, the option to travel is not a reality, whether due to logistical or cultural reasons, some remain confined to the borders of Syria.

4.3.3. Why They Travelled: Individual and Societal Values

This section provides evidence to show that, for those who could and did travel, various factors played a role in the decision making process depending on the values of the individual and the family. Different individuals placed more significance on certain aspects of their life, each providing multiple and various rationalisations, objectives, and motives for the journey, however there was much overlap of the core values described above: dignity, religion, families, community, freedoms and opportunities, and education. There was also a notable emergence of the value of safety, something that the community had never considered until they encountered such high levels of insecurity.

Safety (demonstrated values: safety) – The main reason cited for travel to Bangkok was fear due to the lack of safety. The situation was difficult and many wondered how long they could survive. Box 4.3 conveys a conversation between Ziad and Reema when detailing the unabating fear and anxiety.

Box 4.3 Fear of Death and Coping

Reema: We were very close to death, many times.

Ziad: You can just smell death around you. You face it everywhere.

Reema: Ten meters away, a bomb would go off, or you could hear someone being shot and killed.

Ziad: Can you imagine that you are living here and a bomb hits the building behind you, directly behind you? A moment later, you will proceed with your life and eat and maybe put on some music. Just to ignore what is happening to you and around you. Maybe you will be grateful when

you hear that the bomb hit your neighbours instead of you. And then you will feel guilty for having such a feeling, but you can't help it.

Exposure to violence and anxiety made day to day life extremely difficult in Syria. The constant fear of death was a major motivating factor for all refugees who came from Syria.

Military Conscription (demonstrated values: safety, community, dignity, opportunities) –

> I don't want to fight anyone. I don't want to kill anyone. Even I will not let myself reach a point where I have to fight to live. I wanted to go out of Syria before it came to this. – Ziad

The three families who had male children in their teens and above cited military conscription as one of the main reasons they fled. Both Ibrahim, aged 23, and Ziad, aged 25, left Syria to avoid conscription as well. All men in Syria were required to serve in the military, by law. If they were studying at the university they could postpone service until they graduated. However, with escalating violence, many men, even those who were studying, had already served, and those under age were forced to fight, some were even kidnapped. Once a person was conscripted in Syria, it was dangerous to abandon the army and they would not be able to leave, even after their year of mandatory service had been fulfilled. Many of the men did not believe in the conflict or did not want to take part in fighting. The two main reasons for avoiding conscription were one, they did not want to kill their 'brothers and sisters,' and two, they felt that fighting was not the answer to the issues in their country. As a result, many fled and many more tried to flee.

Box 4.4 Making Trade-offs

Ziad had just finished his studies and was up for military conscription and it could no longer be avoided. He and Reema had been engaged for two years, a long time by Syrian standards, waiting until they both finished their education and were financially secure. They thought the war would be short lived and that their lives would continue as normal. After nearly two years since the start of the conflict, after being displaced from their homes, and trying to survive, they decided to flee Syria together as a married couple.

Hope, Future, and Children (dignity, opportunities and freedoms, education, community, family)

> You can consider that life stopped in Syria, we were just waiting for death
> -Nadia.
>
> Life in Syria was over.
> -Ahmad.
>
> We had some moments in our life in Syria where we were really depressed and hopeless, and we didn't have any chance.
> -Ziad.

> There was no future for me there.
> -Ibrahim

Participants saw Syria as a hopeless place: no job prospects, no place to live, no education opportunities, mandatory military service, and the risk of death at any moment. Ahmad had lost properties, costing him 100s of thousands worth in US dollars, his house in the Yarmouk camp was flattened, and his wife lost their baby.

For Ziad, Reema, and Ibrahim, traveling to Thailand represented hope, a chance to dream of a future. In Syria, they could not live to fulfil their aspirations, and for them, this was enough reason to travel to Thailand. Ibrahim had always wanted to travel and saw moving to Thailand as his chance.

Most families travelled so that they could hope for their children. Amer and Rana, Nasir, Mohammed and Fatima, Iman and Hasham (Hayder's sister and her husband), and Ahmad and Abeer all had more than one child and Nadia had four grandchildren when they chose to leave Syria. Each and every family with children, when asked why they fled, cited the safety of their children and their future. The schools had closed in the Yarmouk camp in December 2012, even if they could find an open school, people were afraid to send their children out of the house.

> I came here for my kids, I want them to have a better life, for their safety. I want them to get a better education and get a new passport so they can go wherever they want. – Amer

This notion of third country resettlement and that individuals would gain, for the first time in their lives, a nationality, was compelling, especially for their children. Iman and Abeer told me on regular visits to the IDC that they travelled for the same reasons. They would say it over and over, several times during each hour-long visit to the prison.

No place to stay (values demonstrated: family, dignity, freedoms) **–** As mentioned above, all refugees had been initially displaced from their homes and struggled to find a new place to stay that was affordable or where they felt safe and comfortable. Ahmad and Abeer stayed in a house with 28 people, Ziad in a house with 20 others, and Amer and Rana were in Amer's sister's house, feeling very uncomfortable and afraid. Ibrahim had left the Yarmouk camp and was living alone at an aunt's house that was otherwise unoccupied that was closer to his university so that he could finish his degree.

The impetus to leave Syria was not simply a matter of not being able to find a place to live. Many were able to live with relatives, as listed above. Essentially issues of pride and privacy were more

important aspects. For example, Ziad and Reema wanted to get married and start a life together, but would have had to live in a crowded home with Ziad or Reema's family, sleeping on the floor, or sharing a bed with other family members. One of the reasons that Ahmad wanted to leave Syria was because he felt ashamed relying on his family and living in their homes and did not want to spend all of their saving on rent with no end to the war insight.

Syrian Government/Political Reasons (values demonstrated: safety, family, freedoms) – Nadia's son, Faruk, was arrested and detained for 45 days. According to Ziad, he was tortured 'in every way you can imagine' for these 45 days. Nadia's other son, Darrak, was also kidnapped by the free army, but was later released. She cited this as one of the many reasons they had to leave.

Ziad's brother Nizar was also arrested. The government soldiers knocked at the door when Nizar answered. He asked if the women could have a moment to cover themselves, as is customary in their culture. At this point the soldiers forced open the door and arrested Nizar immediately. He spent ten days in an over-crowded cell, crouching on the floor, unable to move or stand, which caused irreparable damage to his knees. He fled Damascus to meet his brother in Bangkok immediately after.

After the incident in the Yarmouk camp on December 24th, Ahmad and his family were living with his sister in a safe area in Damascus. After several days he attempted to go back to his house in the Yarmouk camp to collect some things. While there he encountered a national news channel. Soldiers held him at gun point and asked him to say to the cameras that the Yarmouk camp was safe and that people should return. With no other choice, he complied with their requests. After the news report aired, the people living on his sister's street assumed he was supporting the government. This made him constantly feel like he was in danger.

Rescuing family from IDC and Imprisonment – (values demonstrated: family, safety, freedoms and opportunities)

Some families and individuals came to Bangkok to take care of family members who were arrested or detained.

Box 4.5 Rushing to Save Family

Hayder

In December 2013, Hayder, 33, was living in a refugee camp in Lebanon with his mother, father, and brother when his sister, Iman 35, informed him that she would be traveling to Sweden on a forged passport with her children, aged 2 and 3, and her husband. Hayder, at that time, was employed as a tailor. He enjoyed his work and had a girlfriend. On her intended journey to

Sweden, Iman and her family were laid over in Bangkok[13] where they were caught with their forged documents and sentenced to three years in Bangkok's central prison. Hayder, upon the urging of his mother, booked a ticket to Bangkok and flew from Beirut to try to help her in any way he could.

Nasir

Nasir was still in Syria in November 2013 when he received word that his wife and two sons were arrested in Bangkok for having expired visas; they had been arrested with Abeer and Mohammed. Upon hearing this, Nasir obtained a Thai visa and flew from Beirut to try to help his family. It is clear that both Nasir and Hayder value family as they gave up their lives to help them.

4.3.4. How They Decided

Overall, the decision to move was difficult for some and an obvious choice for others. For families and individuals like Ibrahim, Ziad and Reema, Mohammed and Fatima, and Nadia, the decision seemed to come naturally, as if too much had happened for them to stay on and at some point they knew they had to flee. For Hayder and Nasir, the decision was sudden, brought on by their need to help their families in Bangkok.

Others like Amer and Ahmad agonized over the decision.

> It was the hardest decision I have ever made, I had to leave everything I spent my whole life building, but I did it for my children.
> - Amer

Ahmad, as well, tried to stay as long as he could.

Box 4.6 Ahmad and Abeer

After two months of living with his sister, 28 people in one house, the government army paid a visit. The soldiers came into the house and forced the men to line up against the wall. They tried to take Abeer to the side and she became afraid that they would rape her. She started to fight them and shouted "don't touch me!" They started beating her; she fought back for a while, but suddenly she realised that the men in the house could do nothing and,

> She just surrendered, she did not fight anymore. Some of the soldiers beat her with their guns and she lost her baby. She was 2 or 3 months pregnant… I decided to go out of Syria then. The life in Syria, it was over, I could not stay… I tried to stay, but then… it was just time to leave.

The decision to leave was often made by the head of the household, sometimes jointly with other family members. For Amer and Rana, for example, the decision to come to Thailand was

[13] Rumours in the community indicated that human smugglers, would arrange for travel from the Middle East to Europe with Southeast Asia as a stopover. I can only imagine that the logic behind this strategy was to use real travel documents until departing from Southeast Asia, where they would then use forged documents.

made by Amer and his mother. When asked what Rana thought, he told me that 'she always agrees with me.' Ahmad also made the decision to travel as he had made all the family decisions before coming to Thailand. Ziad and Reema, a younger couple in their mid-20s, made the decision together. Mohammed and Fatima have a much more equal relationship even though they are a couple in their 40s and more traditional. However, Mohammed had lived for 10 years in Dubai without Fatima and left her to make many household decisions due to this.

Overall, the decision to flee is derived from the conflict itself – due to fear, anxiety, and political issues, but is also a result of a number of considerations, such as capabilities, feasibility, norms, and a number of core values (both individually and socially derived), such as the importance of family and opportunities to achieve aspirations.

4.3.5. Where They Could Go: Capabilities, Researching, and Networking

Thailand chose us. -Nadia

Traveling outside the region

After deciding to flee and knowing they would have to travel outside of the region, Palestinian-Syrian refugees were faced with additional decisions, asking themselves if they should travel legally or illegally, where they should go, and how they should physically get there. Illegal travel is often faster but riskier. People can pay a substantial sum to be smuggled to Europe either overland through Turkey, or across Africa and into Europe via the Mediterranean, where thousands have drowned. Many are arrested in Turkey or Egypt in the beginning of their journeys. Others are successful in their journey and safely make it to Germany or Sweden, the two most frequently intended destinations.

Legal travel is costly and time consuming. It is nearly impossible, except for the wealthiest of Syrians, to travel to Europe, North America, or Australia directly. Some apply for tourist visas, others apply for student or work visas and most Palestinian-Syrians and Syrians are denied. A more feasible option is to apply for visas to the Gulf countries or other developing countries, but the rejection rate is high for Palestinian-Syrians unless they are already in possession of work visas. Ziad tried to apply for visas in countries he thought would be easier, for example UAE, Egypt, Libya, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand. He was granted a visa for both Russia and Thailand. Ahmad and Nadia also tried many embassies in Syria but to no avail, except for Thailand.

> Thailand chose us. I went to many embassies and they did not accept me. It was when [the embassies] saw the travel document [indicating their stateless status] that they said, 'I cannot issue a visa for you,'
> – Nadia

According to Nadia, every embassy they went to rejected them merely upon seeing they were Palestinian and not Syrian nationals. Different visa laws apply for Palestinian-Syrians, as they are not citizens. Only Thailand was willing to provide tourist visas or, for some, long term retirement visas.

Others, such as Amer, did not even attempt to obtain visas to other countries after seeing that friends and relatives were rejected. Amer and his family went to the Thai embassy knowing they would only be granted a visa to Thailand and did not want to waste time. Ibrahim also did not try to go anywhere else, he just followed his family. He regrets not trying to get a student visa to somewhere like Germany, "I didn't even try, I am not sure why."

Ibrahim's decision fits well with the theory of migrant networks, a well-documented phenomenon in international migration theory. According to international migration theory, migration networks are links that are made between the country of origin and the destination country (Koser, 2007; Massey et al., 1993). These links lead to increased migration to the destination country over time. Essentially migrants are more likely to move to countries where they already have contacts. This influences the decision to move as settlement is easier with contacts in place as the risks and costs are reduced (Koser, 2007; Massey et al., 1993). In addition, the psychological issues, such as stress and anxiety are mitigated. Ahmad, Amer, Reema, and Ibrahim, as well as Hayder and Nasir, all had family members who had previously settled in Bangkok, influencing their decision to travel there.

Doing their homework: Building networks and conducting research

Jihad's family and Nadia's family were the only two of the participants who did not know someone in Thailand before choosing to travel there, but they still sought out and found connections before they arrived. Through his connections, Mohammed located a Syrian man who owned a tourism office in Bangkok. He sold Mohammed his tickets and picked him up from the airport. Mohammed also spent time researching Nana - the Arabic district of Bangkok - where to live, and how to find and contact the UNHCR when in Bangkok. In this way, Mohammed was able to make a plan and felt more secure. Nadia's sons conducted research online before arriving as well. When they booked their tickets, the agent put them in touch with a relative who

already lived in Bangkok. The relative agreed to meet them and help them when they arrived in exchange for bringing him some items from Syria.

All of the families and individuals interviewed engaged in research before they travelled via internet searches or by contacting friends and relatives to provide information (although not all information was accurate). All individuals and families contacted friends or relatives who had links to Thailand and established a connection in the country before flying. This also helped in the decision making process, according to Ziad, for example, Malaysia and Russia were available locations for Palestinian-Syrians but they chose Thailand due the lower cost of living. Ziad knew this because he was able to contact others who had already settled in all three countries to seek asylum.

Choosing Thailand was also the result of some strategic planning; most participants only wanted to go to a country where they could be resettled into a third country. “In Lebanon,” Ibrahim told me, “it is expensive, and you cannot travel with UNHCR to a third country, UNRWA is there, so there would be no resettlement. I wanted to be resettled.” Mohammed, Nadia, Amer, and Ziad all wanted to come to Thailand due to this. Basically, it is the slower, safer, and legal manner in which to permanently resettle in Australia, Europe, or North America.

Box 4.7 Ziad and Reema

Ziad and Reema were in touch with Faruk’s wife, a relative of Reema’s. Faruk and Nadia encouraged Ziad and Reema to rush to Bangkok. They told them that the UNHCR was closing and that they had to come to Bangkok before that and file their application. They informed them that would only be in Thailand for 3 or 4 months and they would travel to another country. They were told to bring enough money for three or four months and they would travel.

> They were not lying to us, they did not know the UNHCR system. We had all heard a story about a man who came to Bangkok who travelled to Australia in three or four days. We heard he was stuck in the airport and that UNHCR arranged for him to travel in just a short time. This was the first person to come to Thailand and that was a successful story. People think that Thailand will be very fast.

As soon as they were granted the Thai visa, they began hurriedly making arrangements to be married and move to Thailand. They were married 8 days later, and travelled 2 days after that. Reema cries when retelling the story of the rushed wedding, and what she left behind. She feels robbed of a very special time in her life, a trade-off that she was difficult to make.

Before choosing to come to Bangkok, families and individuals tapped into or established networks and conducted research. Some weighed their options carefully, while others felt compelled to go to Thailand due to the availability of the visa. For these families, the ability to travel to Thailand was attributed to pre-existing networks as well as their ability to use

technology to conduct research. Ultimately their ability to make informed decisions, assessing the feasibility of travel, had come down to their capabilities.

4.3.6. The Flight Stage - How do we get there?

Crossing into Lebanon

Apart from Mohammed, who was able to fly from Damascus, and Hayder, who was already residing in Lebanon, the remaining six families/individuals had to cross into Lebanon to fly from the Beirut airport. This was a very stressful and long process for many families in the community. At the border there are two lines, one for Syrians and one for Palestinian-Syrians. According to the families, Palestinians are treated worse than Syrians, they have to produce additional paperwork, and are sometimes beaten with sticks by the border guards. If anyone upsets or frustrates a border guard, they can be blacklisted from entry into Lebanon.

Nadia was traveling with her husband, five sons, three daughters in law, four grandchildren, her cousin, his wife and their children and grandchildren, twenty-two people in total. One of her daughter's in law is Syrian. She quickly passed across the border with a stamp on her passport. The rest of the travel party, all Palestinian-Syrians, had to pay fees, essentially forced bribes, to cross, while ironically standing under a sign which read, "No fees are required to enter Lebanon." Another family in the community reported that in order to save them six or more hours at the border and to keep the guards from digging through their luggage they paid hefty bribes.

From Beirut to Bangkok

In November 2013 the first stories of refoulement at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International airport began to circulate through the community. Single Palestinian-Syrian and Syrian men who were travelling alone or with other single men were being rejected at the airport and either arrested or sent back to Syria. There are stories of some who did not even make it to Bangkok, and were kept from their flights in Beirut or connections in countries such as UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain.[14]

Box 4.8 Nasir

Nasir left Syria in a hurry after finding out his family had been arrested and were being held in the IDC. As many of the others, Nasir travelled through Lebanon and attempted to fly to Bangkok from Beirut via one of the Gulf States[15]. While transiting in the airport, on the way to his Bangkok flight, an airline official stopped him, asked for ID and asked Nasir to go with him. The official led him to an office and he found his luggage there. The officer told him, without explanation, to

[14] Most of these stories were told to me by the community as their relatives and friends were rejected, but some media reports confirmed that this was taking place (Hynes, 2014).
[15] The airport and city are purposefully withheld by the author due to potential ethical concerns

wait for the next flight. Three days had passed and Nasir was not allowed to board any of the outgoing flights to Bangkok. He was growing worried and impatient. Finally, an airline official who took pity on him pulled Nasir to the side and said quietly, "Look, our airline does not want trouble, and we have been instructed by the Thai government to no longer allow single Syrian men on our flights to Bangkok. So what you need to do is rebook a ticket through another airline, because they fly to Phuket.[16] Because you have travelled a lot for work, your passport is full and you will look like a tourist and they will let you in there. It is your only option."

Nasir did as was instructed and flew to Thailand the next day via Phuket.

4.3.7. Demonstrating the Decision Making Process: What, Who, Why, Where, and How

Mohammed and Fatima, along with their family, were amongst the first Palestinian-Syrians to come to Bangkok after the start of the conflict, finding safety at a cost. While the presence of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok may seem illogical to outsiders, Mohammed and Fatima tell a very logical and reasoned story about their decision to travel.

Box 4.9 Mohammed and Fatima

Bombs began to fall on the Yarmouk camp the first few days of August 2012. After one to two weeks of enduring bombings and violence, Mohammed gathered his family and moved to his sister-in-law's house in an area of Damascus not far from the Yarmouk camp. They remained in the house for ten days, but the violence was increasing in the Yarmouk camp and thus encroaching upon the neighbourhood where they were. Mohammed began to worry more than ever, "I have young sons and I was scared for them. The Free Army might take them. The government army might take them."

At this point Mohammed started to ask himself what he could do for his family, and it became clear to him that he needed to leave for their safety and for his.

> At this time, when the bombs came to our place, we were scared and we saw our children were scared. It was very dangerous… I was afraid for my children; you don't know when the next bomb will come and if it will hit you. … At this time we thought we need to go outside of the country. Fatima thought that too.

Mohammed had lived in Dubai for several years, working as a construction engineer and had saved some money. He asked his friends in Dubai for help and advice. One friend recommended that they go to Thailand. According to his friend the cost of living was inexpensive and visas were easily obtained. Furthermore, Mohammed had heard that refugees could not stay in Thailand and would be resettled to Europe or America where his families would have opportunities. In addition to all of this, the Thai embassy was one of the few embassies that were still open in Damascus. According to Mohammed, he visited the embassy and obtained a six month visa in a few hours.

Mohammed initially intended on travelling to Bangkok alone to find a place to stay and prepare life for his family, to make the transition easier for all of them. He travelled to Beirut and attempted to fly to Bangkok. He explained that after he arrived to Beirut that there was "no

[16] Phuket is the largest island in Thailand and is popular tourist destination.

answer" about the ticket, he kept going back to the airport many days in a row and they would not issue him a ticket. He never really understood why.

He went back to Damascus to gather his family and to travel with them to Bangkok. By this time it was October 2012 and the Damascus airport was still open to some international flights. He bought tickets and Mohammed, his wife, their four children aged 5 to 16, along with his wife's two brothers, her sister-in-law and their two children boarded a plane and flew to Bangkok, leaving the rest of their family, their house, and their lives behind.

The story of Mohammed and Fatima is useful here because it highlights a number of the above listed factors.

- First, the regular bombings made them afraid for their safety and the safety of their family.
- Second, the military and Free Army presence in the camp made them afraid for the safety and the future of their teenage boys due to the risk of military conscription.
- Third, they did not have family members they felt they could stay with in safe areas of Damascus, making staying in Syria an unlikely option.
- Fourth, Mohammed was well educated and had worked in the United Arab Emirates where wages are exponentially higher than Syria and was able to save, demonstrating their capability to flee due to income.
- Fifth, due to his time in UAE, Mohammed had international connections, which first, provided him with information. Second, he knew would provide him a safety net in case things became difficult, again demonstrating capabilities due to connections.
- Sixth, he was able to do research and understand the refugee law in Thailand and the system with UNHCR. His level of education allowed him to be able to make an informed decision.

Overall, this story demonstrates how values and capabilities factor into is decision making, as he and his wife weighed the factors and chose the option which would allow for the best possible future for his family.

4.3.8. Psychological Aspects of the Flight Stage – Impediments to Wellbeing

The journey from Damascus to Bangkok brought on anxiety, worry, sadness, and even feelings of optimism and relief for the families and individuals. Ahmad had a panic attack while bordering his connecting flight from Abu Dhabi. According to his account he started choking and could not breathe, he was holding a cigarette but did not light it. He was calling attention to himself and was then physically removed from the plane, "they thought I was going to do something," he reported. He was forced to take the next flight the following day.

Amer was frantic and heavy with anxiety on the day of travel. He was constantly worried about what they may have forgotten, worried about check points, or that his bags would be confiscated. He was thinking about the life he was leaving behind and what he would miss. According to Amer, it was a terrible day for him.

Nadia cried on the entire flight; authorities at the Beirut airport threw away her luggage and she had no clothes when she arrived. This brought her to tears that did not stop until they reached Thailand. These tears were replaced by exhaustion and shock due to the intense heat of Bangkok in March, one of the hottest months of the year.

Ziad 'felt a combination of happiness and sadness,' he confided.

> We were very sad because we were out of Syria, out of our lives, our habits, our family, but happy because we were expecting to begin a new life outside of Syria. But we are the kind of people who always hope, who are always expecting things.

Leaving a home of origin to seek asylum in a third country is a massive risk. Not only does an asylum seeker have to make a significant life decision, they have to coordinate the logistic movements of an entire family across a continent with an uncertain outcome. The trauma experienced coupled with the compounding stress of planning makes the flight stage a complex process as well as mentally and emotionally strenuous. Many families also encountered corruption and many unexpected, ambiguous, and disconcerting situations, such as Nasir not being able to leave the airport. The anxiety during this phase was nearly crippling for Amer and Nadia, and did drive Ahmad to have a nervous breakdown.

4.4. Conclusion

Considering societal and individual values and aspirations analysed above, Palestinians-Syrians in this study place value on the following:

1) a life that they see as dignified, where **dignity** is determined by their role in the household, determined by cultural codes, and as viewed by others;
2) to be able to practice their **religion** freely;
3) to ensure their physical **safety and security**;
4) to ensure that their **families** are safe, secure, together, and healthy;
5) to be part of a (Palestinian) **community**;
6) to have access to **freedoms and opportunities**; and
7) to have access to an **education and learning**.

In order to be well and live a life that is valued a number of resources are required. Many values are overlapping and can be categorised into domains of wellbeing. These four domains (education, security and protection, health, and livelihoods) were creating by categorising the highlighted values. For example, dignity is an important part of Palestinian-Syrian values, however, dignity is strongly linked with a number of domains. For a Palestinian-Syrian to feel a sense of dignity, they must feel respected and part of the community (for mental health and security), be able to earn a living (livelihoods), and have access to a number of opportunities, including education. As a result of this overlap, I have categorised these values into four domains, in order to understand what is needed to actualise values and be well. Table 4.1, which I have constructed based on the above findings, provides a structure in which to view values, how they can be actualised, and what corresponding resources are needed to enable their actualisation. This list is not necessarily exhaustive, but helps to build an understanding of what values generally are the most important for this population and what resources are required for them to be actualised.

Table 4.1 Domains of Wellbeing, Values and Needed Resources

Domains of Wellbeing	Values	Resource requisites
Education	Education and learning, freedoms and opportunities, dignity, family, safety and security	Education access (enrolment), access to educational inputs (uniforms/school supplies), secure access (transport), ability to learn new and applicable skills
Security and protection	Families, religion, dignity, freedom and opportunities, community, safety and security	Legal protection/recourse, physical security (institutional), mobility, trust and feelings of security (community and family), family togetherness (proximity and connection), knowledge and information
Health (including mental health)	Families, dignity, community, safety and security	Free/inexpensive health care (for chronic/acute conditions), knowledge and information, community support
Livelihoods	Dignity, freedoms and opportunities, community, family, safety and security	The right to work, physical security (transport and in job), legal recourse, ability to apply skills/knowledge and acquire new skills/knowledge

This model allows us to see what people need to be well, based on their values and what is needed to meet those needs. The table also shows that values are closely linked and that the actualisation of a number of these values are simultaneously needed to achieve wellbeing in each domain, therefore achieving overall subjective wellbeing.

This chapter is important as it links these values, both individual and societal, as well as capabilities, to the process of forced migration, and makes clear the roles that values play in the process. In this chapter I have argued that Palestinian-Syrian refugees residing in Bangkok made a conscious choice to flee Syria to seek asylum. The decision making process and choice to travel to Bangkok, Thailand were based not only on the need to flee conflict and violence, but also based upon the values listed above as well as their capabilities. This decision is a part of the wellbeing strategy. Those who travelled understood where they could go, what they could afford, what they wanted to make their lives better based on what they valued, and endured the risk in an attempt to achieve wellbeing. Those who decided to leave Syria for Thailand weighed the risks and potential consequences. Although traumatised, they chose Thailand using logic, even conducting cost of living research and building networks from Syria. The trade-off for travel were extremely substantial and all refugees experienced feelings of loss, uncertainty, and sadness. They had given up what was familiar to them, their homes, their jobs, and important aspects of their culture and tradition, like the wedding Reema dreamt of her entire life.

It must be made clear that these research findings are not, in any way, implying that, because refugees have agency, they have no claim to international legal protections. These findings should also not be used to dispute the validity and necessity of international refugee law. To seek safety outside of your country of origin is a basic human right, which, I would argue, should extend outside of the purview of the 1951 Convention and 1969 Protocol as both are exclusionary in nature. This research also does not negate the occurrence of sudden catastrophic events which drive masses of asylum seekers across borders or displace them in their home country. What this research does show, and contributes to the literature, is that refugees do have agency and that they consider options in order to make important decisions about their lives. While stress and trauma might interfere with the decision making process, as described in Chapter 2, it does not mean that decisions are necessarily irrational or fear driven. This is especially true in the information age as those wishing to seek asylum can examine multiple options before having to travel, allowing for more informed decision making.

Finally, a significant aspect of this chapter is that it will help the reader to understand the findings in the preceding chapters. For example, this chapter will help to build an understanding around

the importance of institutional constraints for wellbeing outcomes (for example, education is a central value for Palestinians, but they are unable to access it). Essentially we cannot understand how institutions constrain or impede wellbeing if we do not understand what individuals need to be well. The chapter will also help make clear in later chapters the importance of the decisions, trade-offs, and coping and how these decisions impact overall wellbeing.

Chapter 5 Institutions, Structures, and Wellbeing

5.1. Introduction

Human wellbeing is both a process and an outcome, where strategies to achieve wellbeing are dependent upon the context. Essentially, the strategies that individuals employ will depend upon what resources are available and how easily they can be accessed. Wellbeing outcomes will be dependent upon the person's capability to transform those resources into what is needed to be well. The context can both impede capabilities and provide opportunities.

The context, as referred to in this research, is comprised of the interconnected and mutually reinforcing structures and institutions which contribute to wellbeing processes and outcomes. For refugees and forced migrants, in a general sense, relevant structures and institutions can include history, culture, and norms of the country of which asylum is sought; the subsequent policies and treatment of refugees; the ability of service providers to function within the country; and the culture, values, norms, and capabilities of the refugee community. For example, how the country of asylum has historically viewed outsiders or responded to migrant and refugee influxes will contribute to the current policies and practices which are implemented. Service providers must function within this setting, which will influence their ability to be effective. The pre-existing policies and practices of service providers will also influence their effectiveness, in turn contributing to the context (see Figure 5.1). The ability of refugee communities to access resources will be dependent upon this context, as well as their particular attributes.

The purpose of this chapter is to build an understanding of the context in which Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok were forced to navigate. In the particular setting of Bangkok, the relevant context is comprised of a) Thai culture and the policies and practices which are influenced by the culture, b) the formal institutions which seek to provide services, c) the informal institutions which subsequently develop, and d) the role and functioning of the refugee community itself. Figure 5.1 (taken from Chapter 2) below shows the positioning of these institutions, where the individual/household is centred among these institutions. The individual/household, as shown from Chapter 4, maintains its own culture, norms, values, needs, and capabilities, and employs strategies within this context to achieve what they see as a life worth living.

Figure 5.1: Structures and Wellbeing

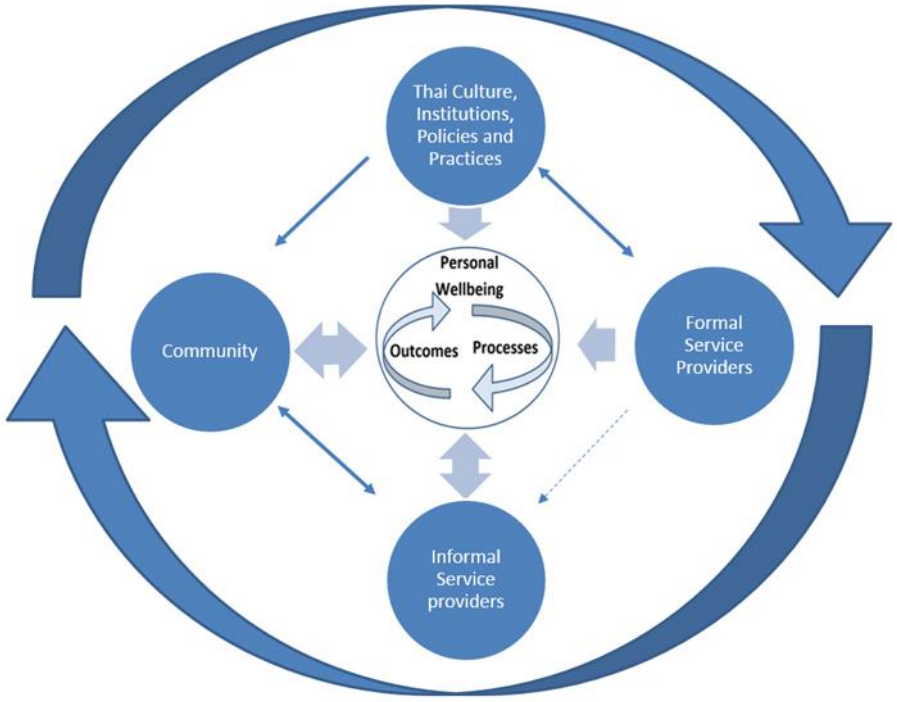


Figure 5.1 shows that personal wellbeing (as subjective, objective, and relational) is influenced by the overall environment. It also shows that personal wellbeing is directly influenced by the relationships between institutions and the individuals/households. In addition, it shows that some relationships are mutually reinforcing in nature, while others are not. For example, community dynamics will depend on personal wellbeing processes and outcomes as much as personal wellbeing processes and outcomes depend on community dynamics (more on this in Chapter 6). Alternatively, the personal strategies of refugees have a limited impact on the policies and practices of the Thai government as well as formal service providers.

In order to build an understanding of the context, this chapter analyses the connection between these structures and their influence on the lives of refugees. The chapter first analyses relevant aspects of Thai culture and history and demonstrates the influence on current policies and practices towards refugees. Second, it analyses the subsequent implications for formal service provision and also demonstrates the effect of internal policies and practices on service provision. The chapter then demonstrates how the context has implications for the wellbeing of Palestinian-Syrian refugees. The chapter concludes by analysing the how informal service providers are utilised and attempt to fill the gaps in service provision when refugees fail to achieve wellbeing.

5.2. Thailand's Institutions

5.2.1 Nation building, 'Thai-ness,' and 'Others'

Nation building

Thailand, according to a large body of research, is a nationalistic country with a long history of institutionalised nation-building (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009; Chachavalpongpun, 2010; Cohen, 1991; Connors, 2007, McCargo 2004, 2011; Renard, 2006; Reynolds, 2005; Streckfuss, 2012; Thananithichot, 2011; Winichakul, 1994). As a result, Thai nationals generally maintain a strong sense of national identity, which has directly resulted in the institutionalised exclusion of outsiders, or 'others' through policies. The long history of nationalism in Thailand has had many implications for non-Thais as it can be seen as a cause for inequitable rights for ethnic minorities, ethnic conflict, and even insular policies that have led to the exclusion and rejection of refugees and migrants. Overall, Thai policies toward refugees are geared to discourage refugees from seeking asylum in Thailand, a policy that adversely impacts their ability to be well.

Nation building was originally and is perpetually, carried out in Thailand by constructing the idea of a unified population with a shared sense of identity, which sees itself as homogenous in religion, language, ethnicity, values, ideology, and devotion to the king. The origins of nation building can be linked to the monarchy in the late 1800s in order to gain social control of a threatened and chaotic geographical area (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009; Connor, 2007; Thananithichot, 2011). Baker and Phongpaichit (2009: 80) argue that the actual labelling and instituting of a 'Thai' ethnicity, was a tactical move by the monarchy in order to combat the French and British claim to the land and the people. In essence, the nation was created through imagination, 'to fit this [particular] space and encompass whoever was inside it' (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009: 80).

According to historical research, by the early 20th Century, the monarchy had worked to mould 'good citizens' through the use of religion and education (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009: 66), and Buddhism became the 'legitimizing force' behind nation building (McCargo, 2004: 156; Renard, 2006). At the same time, primary education was mandated with a strict curriculum for the purpose of inculcating a nationalistic and ethnically cleansed version of Thai history and culture, creating a shared, homogenous identity (Baker and Phongpaichi, 2009; McCargo, 2004; Renard, 2006; Streckfuss, 2012). Nationalist and productivist policies were continued throughout the 20th Century, where universal education and improved access to healthcare, were instituted in order to unify the population in an attempt to stimulate economic development. During the 1970s, according to Thananithichot (2011: 259), new policies were established in order to pressure non-Thais to assimilate and 'to act in ways that confirmed their

membership' in society. During this time laws were introduced that prohibited teaching in languages that were not Thai and banned the teaching of local history (Vaddhanaphuti, 2005). The interior ministry also implemented 'political education' to 'inculcate the national ideology, and duties of citizenship' (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009: 234).

Othering

> "*The enemy must be presented, produced, or implicated and then discursively sustained. It is always projected, if not overtly desired*."
>
> - Winichakul, 1994: 167

Winichakul (1994: 11) argues that part of Thai-ness is created through 'negative identification,' or by group identification through distinguishing themselves from others. The Thai national identity, in this sense comes from defining what is 'un-Thai,' creating 'otherness.' However, 'otherness' exists on a continuum where skin colour and culture indicate the extent to which they are considered welcome. This general attitude is reflected in policies, practices, and the general treatment of others. For example, Thailand, in a general sense, is open to tourism, provides work visas for professional expatriates, readily issues retirement visas to those from Western countries (which require proof of income), and encourages migrant labour when the economy calls for it. However, some groups are less than welcome, including ethnic minorities, migrants from neighbouring countries, and tourists or migrants from South Asia or Africa.

This is made apparent in a number of ways, one of which is the language. White foreigners are called farang, which strictly means foreigner. Darker foreigners (or even Thai nationals), on the other hand, are referred to as khaek. While the direct translation is guest, the connotation is pejorative and is more accurately translated as unwanted guest. This is often reserved for individuals of South Asian descent or Muslims, but can be applied to others with darker skin. In addition, when spending time with younger Bangkokians, you may also hear them highlight things they do not like by referring to them as 'Lao' (e.g. "I don't like that club, let's not go there, it is so Lao"). In this sense they equate what they find unfashionable to the Lao, both the country and ethnic minorities; Thais tend to see their culture and way of life as superior to their northern neighbour.

Veerawit Tianchainan a human rights lawyer with 20 years' experience defending foreign citizens corroborates this finding:

> 'We prefer white people, Caucasians, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese. We don't prefer Lao, Myanmar, Cambodia or Vietnam... Indonesians, Philippinos (they) are not really welcome. So it is discriminatory and built into the system."[17]

Keeping ethnic minorities on the periphery is common in Thailand while integration is uncommon, where the word 'integration' does not even exist in the Thai language. The term more commonly used is *assimilation* in place of integration (Thaweesit and Napaumporn, 2011). The Merriam Webster dictionary defines *integration* as the 'incorporation as equals into society or an organisation of individuals of different groups.'[18] Integration could then be seen as a two-way process; where both the majority and minority populations adjust, but overall the minority group can live and function in society while maintaining many cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions (Thaweesit and Napaumporn, 2011). To assimilate, on the other hand, means 'to adopt the ways of another culture: to fully become part of a different society, country, etc.[19]' Ultimately, to assimilate means giving up the minority identity in order to fit in with the majority culture. In Thailand, the first nationality laws required aliens who wished to become Thai to demonstrate full assimilation in the culture, or the potential to do so (Saisoonthorn, 2006). In Thailand, those who do not wish to 'assimilate', remain on the margins of society, socially, economically, and, in many cases, legally.

The above argument is supported by the fact that Thailand has one of the largest stateless populations in the world (ISI, 2014). Some stateless groups have been residing within the political and geographic borders of Thailand for centuries, even predating the Thai occupation of the kingdom (Vaddhanaphuti, 2005). These groups are negatively referred to as Hill Tribes or Chao Khao, which more accurately translates as Mountain Others (Ibid). Members of the 'Hill Tribes' are seen as non-Thai and have limited access to citizenship and most are either considered illegal migrants or aliens. (Becker, 2008; Vaddhanaphuti, 2005). 'Aliens' are in effect stateless, but are provided identity cards, which shows their legal status, but restricts their right to vote, leave their home district, obtain post-secondary education, or even work legally (Harris, 2013). In order to obtain citizenship, members of 'hill tribes' have to prove that they have lived in Thailand for a certain period of time and demonstrate 'Thai-ness,' which includes speaking fluent Thai. The process of becoming a citizen is slow and difficult in order to discourage increased migration, resulting in further statelessness (Vaddhanaphuti, 2005).

[17] An interview with a Thai human rights lawyer Veerawit Tianchainan: September 2013
[18] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integration
[19] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilate

Implications for 'Others'

According to Streckfuss (2012), the idea of a unified Thai race has been used to 'push forward the extreme nationalist policies' at many times throughout history. The idea of Thai-ness has been merged with that of unity; anyone seen as acting in 'disunity,' or speaking or acting against the government or monarchy can be seen as un-Thai. This strategy has enabled elites to maintain their position against those who may wish to oppose the status quo (Chachavalpongpun, 2010: 332). This idea of unity/disunity has also been, according to Chachavalpongpun (2010) used to oppose different racial groups, making integration and assimilation difficult for ethnic minorities and migrants.

Ultimately, nation building in Thailand has succeeded in repressing ethnic minorities and creating 'the informal notion' of Thai-ness, which is more influential than 'formal legal categories' (McCargo, 2011: 843). As a result, being Thai means conforming to the chosen Thai ethnic identity, the Thai language, and Buddhism, and those who do not conform lose access to rights (Baker and Phongpaichi, 2009, Connors, 2007; McCargo, 2011). The exclusion of outsiders is an institutionalized part of society, and is a barrier to integration for anyone who is not Thai. Migrants and refugees who do not look and act Thai can and often will be singled out by Thai authorities and mistreated. This mistreatment can be justified through nationalism, creating an extremely dangerous position for refugees who lack legal recourse. Nationalism has been and continues to be used to manipulate the population and justify human rights violations, specifically for those who do not exhibit Thai-ness (Muttarak, 2004; Sunpuwan and Niyomisilpa, 2012).

5.2.2 Institutions: Thailand's Policies and Practices toward Refugees

Thailand has had a long history as a destination for asylum seekers in the region, which dates back several centuries (Muntarbhorn, 1992; Wambach, 2012). As of today, Thailand is the host of an unverified number of refugees, potentially hundreds of thousands from at least forty countries, comprising an even greater number of ethnic groups. Thailand's geographical placement, history of relative stability, informal policies toward economic migration, and relaxed visa policies have made it an attractive destination for many refugees, both inside and outside of the region. However, as a non-signatory to international refugee conventions, Thailand's policies and treatment of refugees has mostly been a reflection of its history of nationalism and subsequent culture of exclusion.

Because refugees fall on the political margins, governments can easily implement policies with impunity, and often react negatively to refugees (Jacobsen, 1996). In Thailand, policy responses

toward refugee influxes have been overwhelmingly negative and characterised by restriction of entry, refoulement, handling of refugees by military or armed forces, defining refugees as illegal aliens, restricting access to resources, and forcing refugees to live in camps or detention centres (Jacobsen, 1996; Muntarbhorn, 1992; Wambach, 2012).

Policy factors

Analysis of Thailand's policy responses reveals that policies can mostly be attributed to two major factors: Thailand's culture of exclusion and its foreign policy position. Although, due to the military coup, I was not able to arrange an interview with Thai government authorities, the official stance of the government was reported to me by Veerawit Tianchainan. According to him, the official stance of the government is the following:

> Thailand is not a state party of the refugee convention and thus not obliged to grant asylum. Refugees will be dealt with by immigration law. Asylum seekers should directly go to countries which [have] expressed concerns on the refugee situation and should not have to stop over in Thailand.[20]

Overall, Thailand does not want anyone to seek asylum within its borders. However, Thailand will, at times, respond to foreign pressure, and allow for refugees to reside temporarily, with restrictions. Foreign pressure is often placed on Thailand by 'Western, developed' countries. This was common practice throughout the latter half of the 20th century, when Thailand would only allow temporary refuge for those who were advocated for by the United States and Europe. Examples of this include the Vietnamese boat people who arrived between 1975 and 1988, and Cambodians fleeing the Khmer Rouge overland in 1979 (Muntarbhorn, 1992).

A more recent and relevant example of adjusting policies based on international pressure took place in late 2015. An anonymous UNHCR officer relayed to me that the Thai government had been planning to round up and arrest the Syrians and Palestinians-Syrians residing in Thailand due to national security concerns and the bombing that had taken place over the summer of 2015. The informant, however, relayed that UNHCR had warned the government of the potential reaction from the international community. Due to the fear of backlash, the government instead chose to keep a close eye on the Syrian and Palestinian-Syrian communities, obtaining details of each refugee family residing in the country. They began conducting regular visits, checking in on families at multiple condominiums in the city.

Alternatively, some policy responses to foreign pressure have allowed for Thailand to avoid political rifts with neighbours and refugee-sending countries by rejecting or excluding refugees.

[20] Email dated 02/08/2014

Many examples of these policies have taken place since the end of the last century. Thailand's diplomatic and economic relationships with China and Myanmar (Wambach, 2012), for example, have led to the mass refoulement of refugees at the request of these governments. For example, Rohingya refugees from Myanmar are referred to as Bangladeshi illegal migrants and sent in mass back to Myanmar, while Uighurs seeking asylum from China are regularly sent back (Holmes, 2015; Equal Rights Trust, 2014).

Thailand's policies – Culture of exclusion

Thailand's culture of exclusion influences policies based on two major societal dispositions: non-integration and deterrence. Policies based on *non-integration* are often carried out through detainment and confinement. Veerawit[21] explained that unequivocally the Thai government does not want refugees and will do what they can to abolish any existing or potential 'pull factors,' however if refugees do enter the country, Thailand attempts to 'tolerate them.' If they do enter the country, Thailand will attempt to send them elsewhere as soon as possible, or let them stay 'temporarily in limited space and limited conditions so that it will not become a pull factor for more to come[22].'

To keep refugees in these confined spaces, separated from the Thai population, the government has mostly confined refugees to camps, detention centres, and holding centres, all of which have maintained dire conditions. For example, since 2004, all refugees residing outside of a refugee camp will be arrested if caught without a valid visa. Therefore, refugees who do reside in cities, live in hiding. Over time, however, when third country resettlement is no longer a possibility the Thai government will turn to forced repatriation. This is seen in the case of Cambodia, Lao, and is currently underway for Burmese refugees (Head, 2009; HRW, 2012; Mydans, 2009; Naing, 2014a, 2014b; Wambach, 2012).

Policies based on deterrence are enforced to ensure that Thailand is not a welcoming environment for refugees and to discourage refugees from seeking asylum in Thailand. Interviewees from Asylum Access Thailand (AAT)[23], Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS)[24], and UNHCR[25] all reported that the Thai government purposefully attempts to deter asylum seekers through various policies. First, this is done through the restricted access of resources for those seeking asylum (e.g. education, health care, security, and work), this also includes restricting the access

[21] Interview 03/09/2013
[22] Ibid
[23] Interview 10/10/2013
[24] Interview 02/08/2013 and 20/08/2013
[25] Interview 26/07/2013

of service providers to refugee communities. Second, the Thai government interferes with the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process, pressuring UNHCR to systematically reject certain groups from becoming recognised refugees. Third, the Thai government rejects would-be asylum seekers at ports, borders, and airports. For example, the Thai military pushed hundreds of Rohingya asylum seekers on boats back out to sea when they attempted to land on the shores of Thailand. They allegedly tied their arms behind their backs and pushed their boats out with no engines (Rivers, 2009; IRIN, 2009; UNHCR, 2009a).

Box 5.1 Refoulement and Rejection of Syrians in Thailand

In November 2013 the first stories of refoulement at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International airport began to circulate through the community. Single Palestinian-Syrian and Syrian men who were flying alone or with other single men were being rejected at the airport and either arrested or sent back to Syria. Some did not even make it to Bangkok, and were kept from their flights in Beirut or connections in countries such as UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain.[26] Reema and Ayda told of a cousin being rejected at the airport and sent back to Syria. Members from the community told of Syrians being held in detainment centres in the airport, unable to leave or access UNHCR. This policy had effective outcomes for the Thai government as I was told of relatives who abandoned their plans to come to Bangkok. This also added much stress to the community as many were hoping to welcome young family members, who may have been forced to stay in Syria and fight.

5.2.3. Discouraging Refugees: Creating an Adverse Environment

Thailand's policies seek to discourage refugees from claiming asylum in Thailand by creating an adverse environment, attempting to restrict refugees and asylum seekers from accessing their basic rights and basic needs. The government creates adverse conditions in regards to all four domains of wellbeing: education, health care, security, and limits livelihoods opportunities. Institutionalised practices, such as exclusion of the 'other,' also contribute to the poor treatment of refugees by Thai authorities and Thai citizens. The purpose of this section is to analyse these institutionalised policies and practices, building and understanding of the resulting context.

Education

Education is a specifically important cultural value for Palestinian-Syrians. Families even travelled away from Syria due the closure of schools, hoping to provide their children with education opportunities. However, education in Thailand is far from accessible. Historically Thailand has restricted access to public education for children who lack birth registration or are residing in Thailand illegally. As a result, only Thai citizens have had access to education. However, in 2005, the *Cabinet Resolution on Education for Unregistered Persons* legally granted

[26] Most of these stories were told to me by the community as their relatives and friends were rejected; only one media report confirmed that this was taking place (Hynes, 2014).

the right of all children to attend public education. This, in theory, meant that all children residing in Thailand, regardless of citizenship could attend 15 years of cost-free education, starting from pre-kindergarten to the secondary education level.

In reality, refugee children are still restricted from education. First, when refugees attempt to access public primary education institutions they are often rejected by local schools. Secondly, a child must already speak Thai to enter primary education. As most parents are migrants, they do not speak Thai, cannot teach their children Thai, and cannot afford to send their children to private tutors to learn. The director of In Search of Sanuk informed me that even when a child finally learned Thai, that the schools would only allow them to enter the first grade, regardless of their previous education experience or age. For example, the organisation helped a 17-year old enter the first grade. Third, even if they are accepted, they have to buy school uniforms, books, and supplies, which most cannot afford. Fourth, even if they are accepted and can afford materials, they are at risk of being arrested by immigration while traveling to and from school. In November 2013, for example, a group of twenty one Pakistani Ahmadiyya refugees, which included five to six mothers, and their 15 or 16 children, were arrested when walking their children to school.

Security and protection

The community reported that security was a major concern for refugees in Bangkok as refugees are not distinguished from illegal migrants and are unable to access legal protection. According to Thai law, all refugees are illegal migrants and subject to detention and deportation if caught without a valid visa. Due to this, refugees have no recourse in which to seek security or protection. As a result, any opportunist could take advantage of refugees, placing refugees in a very precarious position. For example, landlords and employers, other foreigners, police, and immigration officials could threaten, coerce, and extort refugees with impunity. This also means that community members could act with impunity towards one another, knowing that the authorities would not be called as the entire community could be arrested as a result. The repercussions of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

Box 5.2 Mistreatment and Extortion

"An Iraqi man has their passports, he went to the police station after he heard of my sister's arrest and took them, saying he was their family. I was still in Lebanon then. Now he won't give them back unless I pay him 40,000 baht for each. That is 80,000 baht, how can I pay him that?"

"Hayder, they will get new passports when they get resettled, they don't need them. Please don't pay him."

Hayder agreed not to pay the Iraqi man and drop the issue. He called the Iraqi man to tell him he did not want the passports. The next day, two large men came to his room, knocked on the door and told him that the 'Iraqi man'[27] wanted 40,000 THB and they expected him to pay or that he would make trouble for him and his family. Hayder agreed to this and paid the man, who did then leave him alone.

Fear of authorities and the IDC

On a daily basis, refugees reported living in fear of being stopped by military, police, or immigration authorities. If refugees were stopped, they would either pay a bribe or be arrested and taken to the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC). Officially, only immigration authorities had authority to ask to see a visa and they must first obtain a court order to do so. In reality, however, immigration officers, military, and police stop any foreigner they choose and ask to see their visa, with a tendency to target foreigners with darker skin. Generally, when refugees are stopped by authorities the outcome will vary. The authorities may directly ask for a bribe; the amount can vary from 50 THB to 30,000 THB[28], depending on where the refugee is from. The official may not ask for a bribe, but will sometimes take one when offered and release the refugee. Finally, the official may not ask for a bribe nor accept a bribe and arrest the refugee.

UNHCR provides the Thai government with an official list of asylum seekers and refugees based on country of origin.[29] Therefore the Thai government is always aware of the numbers of individuals from each country. According to an informant from Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), when the numbers of one particular group increase, immigration 'crack downs' will take place. This is when immigration police will stake out neighbourhoods or apartment buildings and arrest whomever they can find. According to the representative from Thai Committee for Refugees (TCR), crackdowns are used by the Thai government to send a message that says, 'you are not welcome here.'

A representative from Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)[30] and an informant from JRS[31] suggested that the purpose of crackdowns may actually not be so tactical. They believed that immigration officials seek bribes, and only arrest those who cannot pay. Corruption is so endemic in the culture of the immigration police that lower level officers must pay bribes upwards in order to keep their jobs and save face. They suggested that this is the impetus for 'crack downs.' Evidence would suggest that both beliefs hold truth. When conducting visits to

[27] Hayder's exact description of the man
[28] Less than $1.50 US up to $1,000 US
[29] Interviews: JRS 20 Aug /08/2013, UNHCR 26/07/2013
[30] 26 July /07/2013
[31] 1 Jan 01/01/2014

the Immigration Detention Centre detainees (from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Syria) often reported that they were arrested and the arresting officer did not ask for a bribe or take one. Alternatively, refugees in the community reported that bribes paid to immigration and police officers kept them from being detained.

After the military coup in May 2014, the Palestinian-Syrian refugee community began to be targeted by the Thai police. Plain clothes officers would wait outside the buildings where the families lived and detain men and young men, asking for bribes of up to 30,000 THB. In one instance, one young man who did have a valid visa was detained by the police. He showed his visa and asked to be released. The police then told him that he still had to pay the bribe or they would arrest him for drug possession, although he was not carrying drugs. As a foreigner and as a Palestinian, with no embassy in which to seek support, he had no choice but to ask his employer for the money to pay the bribe. The families felt trapped inside of their homes, afraid to come out or go home. Some Palestinian-Syrian refugees fled their homes and relocated in the city as the daily fear became too much to bear.

Based on an interview with a Thai visa attorney[32], since the military coup, the military dictator, Prayuth had promised to fight corruption and had begun to do so with what he saw as the most corrupt organisation, the immigration office. Due to this, immigration officials were closely watched and began to act in accordance with the laws, seeking court orders to check visas and no longer asking for bribes. According to the attorney, immigration officials were afraid to misstep and were being very careful. Since the immigration officers were no longer engaged in extortion, the regular police had stepped into their place. Their tactics of coercion, extortion, and fear mongering were much more extreme such as staking out families and threatening drug charges, for example. The example below demonstrates some of the most severe tactics of the police, although directed at the Sri Lankan community.

> “Fawahz[33], you have to leave now, other Sri Lankans are coming to the house,” Dwight warned.
>
> “Wait, why does he have to leave? It is only Fausi; why is he hiding from a 13 year old girl?” I asked.
>
> “The other Sri Lankans can’t know where he is, even Fausi; it isn’t safe. The police came to his house and stole all of his savings and told them they would arrest him if he did not help the police break into the homes of other refugees so the police could steal from

[32] Field notes 26/07/2014
[33] Name changed

them. He helped them break into one house but then had to go into hiding. He had to break contact with all of his friends and quit his job."

"But that was a really good job. How will he support his family?"

"I don't know."

The fear of being arrested and being placed in the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) was intensely felt throughout refugee communities in Bangkok and was an extremely legitimate concern. It was exceptionally difficult to be released from the IDC and, when it was feasible, the process to be released could take a long time. Once arrested, a person from a non-neighbouring country must stay in the IDC until they a) are resettled by UNHCR, b) fund their own deportation, or c) make bail based on humanitarian grounds, such as being sick or elderly. The policies on bail changed on a very regular basis. From the time I arrived in August 2013 to when I last visited Thailand in December 2015, the policy had changed six times. At first, any person with UNHCR granted refugee status by the Thailand office could be bailed out. After some time, however, the policy changed so that only those who had been accepted by a resettlement country, such as Australia or Canada, could be bailed out. Several months later, all of the above, plus a plane ticket to leave the country was needed to be bailed out. The longest staying individual in the IDC during my visits was a Vietnamese man that had been there for 12 years. He had been rejected by the UNHCR and unable to return to Vietnam due to fear of torture and death upon return.

The IDC is chronically overcrowded. The IDC was built to house foreigners on a very temporary basis. The prison lacks regular amenities, and the cells were built to hold roughly 10 to 20 people at most. Prisoners are separated into three major groups, long stay, short stay, and North Koreans. The long stay group is comprised of individuals and families from outside of the region who have overstayed their visas. They are divided into two groups: men and then the women and children. This means that when families are arrested, fathers are separated from their children. The woman's room, from my last visit in September 2014 was filled with over 150 women and children. They had one shower spigot and one toilet among them and they sometimes slept in shifts depending on the occupancy. According to the women I visited, the rooms were filled with worms, rats, cockroaches, and mosquitoes. Communicable diseases and parasites such as scabies, pink eye, lice, coughs, colds, flus, and many others were continually spread. The food offered to all prisoners generally consisted of stale rice and clear broth.

Health care

Generally, access to health services in Bangkok is highly inequitable, regardless of legal status. There are private facilities that provide an excellent quality of health care, but these facilities

are unaffordable for most. Public facilities, on the other hand, are more affordable, but the standard of care is often questionable. When Palestinian-Syrian refugees sought health care, due to a lack of financial resources, they utilised public facilities that were of a poor standard. Many Palestinian-Syrians expressed concern over these standards and were also afraid to access public health care due to concerns of being arrested en route or at the hospital.

In the Suan Luang community Palestinian-Syrians did have access to a non-emergency free clinic that was located very near the building where they lived. The clinic offered free basic health checks. However, during each visit, the doctors would prescribe at least three medicines, often many more, for each visit, which the families did have to pay for. For urgent, chronic, or complex health care issues, medical care was difficult to access as refugees would have to pay out of pocket.

Livelihoods

With the same status as illegal migrants, refugees in Thailand do not have the right to work. For those who were able to find informal employment, there were many risks involved. First they had to consider their personal security when traveling to and from work. Traveling through the city left refugees exposed, where police and immigration police could stop them at any time. Second, they had to consider security levels while at work: would the employer be raided by security? Would an unhappy customer report them to the authorities? Would their employer report them? The third main concern is mistreatment, which has an impact on dignity. Would refugees be paid sufficient wages? Would they be over worked, physically abused, or verbally abused? As a result, engaging in informal labour as a livelihood option was difficult for refugees in Bangkok.

5.3. Formal Service Providers

5.3.1. Operating within Thai Policies and Institutions

Thailand's policy of deterrence also involves the creation of adverse conditions through limiting service provision and creating a difficult environment for service providers to work. As stated in Chapter 2, when a state fails to provide appropriate social policies to ensure that basic needs are met, a number of other actors will step in to take the place of the government. However, in order to discourage refugees from seeking asylum in Thailand, the Thai government limits access to basic rights and services by interfering with service provision. This section examines the Thai government's interactions with these organisations and the constraints which are placed upon them.

The Thai government keeps tight control over service providers, including the UNHCR and international and national NGOs. These organisations are required to obtain special permission from the Thai government in order to work with urban refugees. Only one national NGO is legally allowed to provide services to refugees, which is the Thailand Committee for Refugees (TCR). According to the founder of TCR, this was only done through using influential contacts. No other national organisations, and only three other international organisations are legally able to provide services for refugees in Bangkok. Other large international organisations have lobbied the Thai government to be allowed to provide services to urban refugee populations, but have been denied, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC). It ultimately took the IRC 18 years to gain the right to work with camp populations, according to the representative from TCR. International organisations which have agreements with the government to provide services in Bangkok, namely UNHCR, Asylum Access Thailand (AAT), and Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), are only granted permission on a yearly basis and feel that the relationship with the government is therefore tenuous.

Thai government v. UNHCR

> "Is this Thai law or UNHCR policy… I think I am confused"
>
> Representative from TCR: "If you work in this field you will often be confused"

The relationship between the Thai government and UNHCR is convoluted, at times the relationship is tenuous, or despotic, and at other times collusive. In regard to urban refugees, UNHCR's arrangement is informal, as Thailand formally does not allow for refugees to reside in urban areas. UNHCR therefore only operates within the context in which the Thai government allows, making the situation very precarious in many ways. According to JRS[34] and the UNHCR[35], the Thai government can, at any time, halt the refugee status determination process or, at worst, expel UNHCR from Thailand completely.

The 'one false move' idiom, often used in films and literature depicting hostage situations, seems highly applicable. In many ways the fear of the Thai government's reaction provides an on-going tension, as if they are waiting for Thailand to metaphorically pull the trigger. A false move, or misstep, can include drawing international attention to the mishandling of a situation on the side of the Thai government or noncompliance with the wishes of the Thai government, or any Thai agencies. In 2007, for example, the Thai government, due to political issues with UNHCR, shut down the entire Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process. The UNHCR advocated the

[34] Interview 20/08/2013
[35] Interview 26/07/2013

government to reopen it. The government finally agreed over time, but the programme only exists on an informal basis.

Another major issue is that the Thai government regularly interferes with UNHCR operations. One way in which this is done is that the Thai government forces the blanket rejection of a number of refugee groups, namely Vietnamese and Lao Hmong, Falun Gong, and the Khmer Krom[36]. A US embassy informant and a representative from JRS both stated that the Vietnamese Hmong were rejected because there was dwindling interest in resettlement, and Thailand did not want to create further 'pull factors' for others to come.

At the same time UNHCR, as an international organisation, does carry some weight and negotiating power. According to representatives from the Thai Centre for Refugees (TCR), Asylum Access Thailand (AAT) and In Search of Sanuk, they play down this power immensely in order manipulate the situation in their favour, and essentially remove responsibility to act in certain situations. According to the heads of In Search of Sanuk and TCR, the UNHCR uses exaggerated threats of the Thai government to avoid a heavier workload. For example, according to representatives from TCR and AAT, UNHCR in Bangkok will not allow for refugees to have legal representation during the RSD interview. This is a global policy and all asylum seekers should be able to have a lawyer present during the interview. UNHCR refuses to allow this, and states that the Thai government's opposition as its main reason.

UNHCR is often at the mercy of the Thai government, at the same time, both the government and UNHCR use one another to their advantage. Regardless of whether or not UNHCR is ruled by or working in collusion with the Thai government, what is very apparent is that the UNHCR operates under multiple restrictions and the system is far from transparent. This has a profound impact on the operations of UNHCR and deeply impacts the day-to-day lives of refugees as they are constantly struggling to understand the situation. This will be discussed further below.

NGOs and the government

The NGOs must also operate under the rules and regulations of the Thai government and are very constrained, and are monitored and threatened regularly. For example, the representative from JRS reported that the Thai immigration police had come to JRS on multiple occasions, and had detained employees on at least one occasion. In October 2014, immigration police came to JRS and arrested at least three refugees. Other refugee families hid in the offices waiting for

[36] JRS interview 20/08/2013

nightfall to sneak away[37]. This, of course, left refugees feeling unsafe in seeking assistance from NGOs.

In addition, working with the government to advocate policies for refugees is extremely difficult and time consuming. Justifying the assistance of 'others' is a difficult task and many face opposition from the government. To use another example, the representative from TCR reported that when he advocated for birth registration for refugees in camps, he was labelled a national traitor. Many were questioning why non-Thais would be allowed to be registered at birth. It took him 15 years to push legislation through.

UNHCR and NGOs

In addition to the government, NGOs must also maintain a positive working relationship with UNHCR. Working relationships in the field are very important but are often very fragile. According to numerous sources, NGOs feel reluctant to speak against the UNHCR, and there has been a long history of poor relations between the UNHCR and the NGOs. As an international organisation, the UNHCR wields much more power than the NGOs operating in Bangkok and NGOs must be careful not to upset UNHCR employees as they will retaliate by becoming uncooperative and withholding information. Overall, the organisations do not collaborate or coordinate well due to unease and tension, which causes disruptions in services to refugees.

According to interviews with NGOs (AAT, CCSDPT, COERR, JRS, TCR) UNHCR is seen as difficult to work with. First, UNHCR is quick to shut out other organisations when they do not act according to how UNHCR dictates. As a result, UNHCR alienates potentially useful groups and further limits the availability of resources. Second, UNHCR does not trust other organisations and, therefore, does not delegate responsibilities when it lacks capacity, which creates another obstacle for refugees to find the resources they need. Third, UNHCR employees have acted hostilely towards other NGOs, creating rifts amongst service providers.

According to AAT, the relationship between UNHCR and the NGOs has been improving slowly. This improvement can be witnessed by the regular participation of both formal and non-formal service providers at Bangkok Asylum Seekers and Refugee Assistance Network (BASRAN) meetings. These meetings take place every six weeks to two months and allow service providers and volunteers the opportunity to share news and information. From the first meeting I attended in August 2013 to my last in August 2014 membership had grown and members from organisations such as JRS and UNHCR began to attend more regularly.

[37] Interview In Search of Sanuk 10/24/14

However, the institutional issues and lack of coordination still exist and these lead to inefficiencies and contribute greatly to the poor service delivery for refugees. Unwillingness to work with groups, hostile relationships, and unequal power structures mean that service providers are not able to make good use of resources and that they cannot effectively advocate for the rights of refugees. According to a representative from CCSDPT this lack of coordination, and the placating of the Thai government, leads to a lack of protection for refugees due to an extremely weak network.

5.3.2. Formal Service Provision: Internal Constraints

As well as the constrained environment imposed by the Thai government, service providers are faced with a limited budget and are grossly understaffed, impeding their ability to deliver useful services. As a result, refugees are unable to access the resources they need to live well. In addition to this, as explained in Chapter 2, informal service providers are faced with their own organisational challenges as a result of imposed coping mechanisms, which drive service providers to detach themselves, leading many to mistreat refugees. This section will analyse these constraints which include bureaucracy issues and a low budget and show how subsequent burnout, detachment, transference, and reality distortion affect policies and treatment of refugees.

Constrained resource provision

Bureaucracy and budget

Bureaucratic rules and procedures are a major impediment for service delivery for both UNHCR and NGOs. According to a COERR representative, the strong bureaucratic system of the UNHCR is a large obstacle to changes in policies. The COERR representative pointed out that this, in combination with Thai culture, dictates a strict adherence to rules and policy and a general lack of critical analysis or questioning of authority. Ultimately, this lack of flexibility leads to goal displacement, where any change in the needs of the population or any unexpected event is often overlooked or dismissed, even in the direst of circumstances.

For example, one such incident occurred when Nadia and Amer first arrived in Bangkok. At this time, their mother had a heart attack and was in critical condition. Neither Nadia nor Amer's family were registered with the UNHCR at this time, meaning that neither had asylum seeker status nor refugee status. As soon as their mother fell ill they called UNHCR for assistance. However, UNHCR said they could not help them because they were still unregistered and there was a backlog of registration. No exception could be made according to UNHCR and their mother died a few days later. When Faruk, Nadia's son, asked about this policy at a meeting with UNHCR

one month later, the representative said, “That is our policy, we do not help those who are not yet registered.” The representative did not say he was sorry for their loss. This sent the message to both Nadia and Amer’s family that the UNHCR holds the importance of policy adherence above human life. As a result they felt anger and mistrust toward UNHCR from the beginning of their time in Bangkok.

Limited resources and staff shortages

When interviews for this research were first conducted in late summer and early autumn of 2013, according to UNHCR there were 4,906 persons of concern in Bangkok (including asylum seekers, refugees, or unregistered individuals). By December 2014, the number of asylum seekers and refugees had gone up to 8,560, due to an influx of Pakistani refugees who had sought asylum in Bangkok at that time. This was an unprecedented increase.

Table 5.1 Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Bangkok

	October 2013	December 2014
Refugees	1089	1375
Asylum Seekers	2336	7185
Unregistered[38]	1481	0
Rejected or unregistered	Unknown	Unknown
Total	4906	8560

Source: UNHCR [39]

During this time, the budget for UNHCR is reported to have decreased by 50 per cent and no other NGOs had expanded their budgets to match the increase in need[40]. Understaffing was an issue before the increase in population occurred. NGOs therefore relied heavily on a number of unpaid volunteers and interns to supplement the shortage of staff. Consequently, although programmes were technically in place to provide resources, they were majorly understaffed. Table 5.2 shows the number of staff that work with urban populations by organisation.

[38] The number of unregistered individuals had dropped dramatically by early 2014 when UNHCR changed its registration policy so that asylum seekers were registered the same day that they visited UNHCR, and UNHCR conducted ‘mobile registration’ campaigns and went to communities to help them register.

[39] These numbers were provided to members of the Bangkok Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance Network (BASRAN) by UNHCR at meetings in August 2013 and December 2014

[40] Interview with the head of COERR 26/08/2013

Table 5.2 Number of full time staff by NGO

Organisation*	Number of full time staff for urban refugee programmes
Asylum Access Thailand (AAT)	10
Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS)	8
Boat People SOS (BPSOS)	1
Thai Committee for Refugees (TCR)	5

Source: Information provided during interviews

* This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but to demonstrate the limitations experienced by each organisation

AAT, for example, had a community outreach programme. The community outreach programme was designed to offer technical training, provide information on safety and security, and attempt to empower refugees by informing them of their rights. While the programme was much needed and well-intended, there, at the time of interview, was only one full time staff member working on this programme. Similarly, the legal team only had the capacity to provide legal services to roughly 200 asylum seekers per year.

JRS provides another example. They had a casework team comprised of two full time employees and one intern. The role of the caseworkers was to conduct empowerment programmes, livelihood programmes, and visit the majority of communities in Bangkok on a regular basis. Their role was also to help children enrol into Thai public schools and run two community centres. However, with over 100 communities and thousands of refugees, two caseworkers could accomplish relatively little.

Domains of wellbeing and the lack of resources

Overall, the lack of funding and staff meant a lack of assistance in education, health care, and livelihoods support:

Education

The BRC, which was run by COERR, previously provided education for both asylum seeker and refugee children. As a result of budget cuts and a growing population, it changed its services and the BRC became a language centre for intensive Thai classes so that children could become enrolled in Thai schools. According to the UNHCR policy, children will remain in Thailand for long periods and should learn Thai and then enter Thai schools[41]. This shift in services was problematic as the intensive classes would only be available to refugees and not asylum seekers. Since individuals are asylum seekers for roughly two to three years, they would miss out on

[41] UNHCR Head of Protection – BASRAN meeting 31/07/14

education during this period. Depending on the age and previous education of the child, it could take up to two years to learn Thai sufficiently to enter into primary education. At this rate, a child would be missing out on four to five years of education. At the same time, many children lived too far from the BRC to attend regularly as daily travel to the centre is unsafe and expensive.

Health

The Bangkok Refugee Centre (BRC), which was run by COERR on behalf of the UNHCR, previously provided health care for both asylum seekers and refugees and covered the cost of emergency and outpatient medical treatments. However, due to budget cuts the BRC/UNHCR could no longer afford to offer these services. As a result, since the second half of 2014, the BRC began referring all outpatients to a foundation called the TzuChi Foundation, a Buddhist relief agency. The foundation provided routine medical check-ups, vaccines, and basic health care for refugees and asylum seekers one Sunday per month. During this day the clinic could only see 300 patients, which meant over the course of a year, less than half of the total refugee population could be seen once. The BRC clinic was only open to children under five, emergencies, serious mental health problems, and some chronic conditions. Overall, the services provided were inadequate to meet the health needs of refugees in Bangkok.

Access to mental health care was also extremely limited, although a definite need. Both JRS and the BRC purported to offer mental health services. According to the representative from COERR, the BRC should have one psychologist on staff. However, at the time of interview, the psychologist post had turned over twice in recent years and still remained vacant[42], and the representative was uncertain as to why the post had not been filled. JRS had one only psychosocial counsellor on staff. In addition to this, the counselling services were based on the 'Western' model of mental health and were not necessarily applicable to all members of the community.

Livelihoods

Due to the limited budget, UNHCR and other NGOs such as JRS provided very limited livelihoods support. For example, JRS, at the time of the interview in August 2013, provided financial support to asylum seekers (not refugees) in the form of 500 THB (15 USD) per person for six months. For a family of four, that amounted to 2000 THB. An amount that would, for example,

[42] 26/08/2013

only cover the monthly rent for a very low quality dwelling, especially considering that refugees are often faced with exploitative prices for housing.

The BRC only provided financial assistance to refugees and not to asylum seekers. In very rare cases and emergencies, according to the representative from COERR, the BRC would provide financial assistance to an asylum seeker. The monthly assistance amount, as of December 2014 was 2000THB for a single person, 3000 for a couple and 800 for each child. The total could not exceed 7000THB per month for each family. The funds were only available to those considered the most vulnerable as assessed by BRC staff. According to interviews with service providers, single mothers and those with chronic illnesses are considered the most vulnerable. The assessment is, according to the refugee community, also based on what physical assets families possess, and BRC will conduct home visits to see if individuals qualify for aid.

5.3.3. Service Providers and Negative Coping Mechanisms

Overwork and burnout

Some of the individuals who were employed by NGOs and UNHCR, especially junior level staff members were seen by the Palestinian-Syrian community as compassionate and earnest in their attempts to assist refugees. However, the majority of employees were seen as 'negative' and lacking any compassion or empathy. For example, Ibrahim felt that the 'normal employees' (meaning a junior employee) of UNHCR seemed to want to help, but they could not due to the politics and bureaucracy. He felt that people higher up could help if they were 'not so negative.'

This is consistent with Walkup's (1997) research, which suggests that new and dedicated employees of humanitarian assistance organisations tend to overwork themselves to compensate for the lack of available resources. For formal service providers in Bangkok, the work they did was low paid, the hours were long, they regularly witnessed devastating human suffering, and they lacked institutional support for the resulting psychological issues. Subsequently, these workers burned out; some left Bangkok and the field, while others continued on. During my 14 months in Thailand I saw many positions turn over at AAT, JRS, TCR, BPSOS, and UNHCR. The when the director of legal services of JRS left Thailand to take a post in another major city outside of the region, he expressed frustration towards the overall situation in Thailand and the barriers to change and progress. Overall, the burdens were heavy and it seemed that employees were not able to handle the extreme stress. Many even burned out long before they know it (see box 5.3).

Box 5.3 Burnout

A JRS employee, a lawyer who worked with families in the Immigration Detention Centre, informed me it was her last week of work.

“I am leaving next week. It is time to move on.”

“Oh, I am sorry to hear that,” I said, “You must be feeling burnt out”

“No,” she responded, appalled and angry, as if I was accusing her of a crime, “I am leaving before I do burn out. I have seen what burn out does, and it makes people bad at their jobs.”

For months the employee displayed signs and symptoms of burnout that were rather obvious, but refused to acknowledge them, even to herself.

Detachment, transference, and reality distortion

Most employees who stayed on and worked, despite experiencing burnout, employed the coping mechanisms of detachment, transference, and reality distortion. These coping mechanisms manifested themselves in ineffective service delivery, negative practices, and poor treatment of refugees.

Detachment, caused service providers to disengage from communities, which led to a lack of insight into what services refugees actually needed (see box 5.4). The majority of service providers, including UNHCR officers, only encountered refugees when refugees visited the offices of the respective agencies. Very few employees actually travelled out to communities and those who did only saw communities one or two times over the course of their entire stay in Bangkok and most visits would only last a few hours or half of a day at most. As a result, the programmes that were created did not match the needs of refugees and were often inaccessible. This is demonstrated in a number of cases, some of which are described below.

Box 5.4 Detachment and Lack of Knowledge

An Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) consultation/workshop, took place in September 2013. Attendees included service providers from all of the relevant NGOs and refugees from several refugee communities including Palestinian-Syrians, Vietnamese, Sri Lankans, Congolese, Pakistani Christians, and Pakistani Ahmadiyyas. During the APRRN consultation the APRRN staff organised an activity that helped illustrate the above argument. The service providers and refugees were separated and both groups took part in the same activity in different rooms. The activity was to draw a picture of the average day of a refugee. The service providers drew their pictures and presented, showing refugees sitting on the floor, essentially wasting away, waiting for handouts and services from the NGOs. Later in the day the refugee group presented their average day to the service providers. They showed pictures of their communities cooking, working in the home, working outside of the home, looking for employment, teaching their children, and attending religious services. There was a resulting

shamed silence from the service providers who suddenly realised they were clueless about how refugees lived their daily lives.

The education programmes developed provided examples of the mismatch and lack of utilisation. Providing education access was one of the aims of JRS, Thailand Committee for Refugees (TCR) and Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR). Both JRS and TCR reported that they helped enrol children into local Thai schools. However, this programme was not accessed by the Palestinian-Syrian refugee population due to a number of factors. When asked why the community did not try to enrol their children in Thai schools, they reported the following. First, parents struggled to teach their children Thai as parents did not speak or read Thai. Also, it was difficult to find volunteers to teach Thai, and hiring a private tutor was expensive. Second, there was a lack of will and capacity, as many parents suffered from a number of psychological and stress disorders as they attempted to sustain a livelihood; trying to find ways to teach their child Thai was a top priority for any family, and again, not feasible. Third, Thai schools were seen as low quality, and the effort it would take to teach a child Thai was not seen as worth the outcome. Finally, children also suffered from psychological issues and families felt they would have had trouble learning and focusing in such stressful environments.

In regard to health, the UNHCR had attempted to implement a number of programmes in order to assist refugees in finding health care alternatives, none of which had been successful. Poor practices, such as implementing policies without sufficient evidence had been an impediment to success. For example, as UNHCR was phasing out its medical programme at the BRC it initiated an insurance scheme. The scheme attempted to provide health insurance for refugees and asylum seekers. To enrol in the programme the cost was 2,800 THB (roughly 90 USD) per person and the UNHCR proposed to cover 600 THB of the total and offered to fully fund insurance schemes for 500 of the most vulnerable. However, the UNHCR was only able to get one hospital to agree to accept the insurance scheme and the pilot was launched with many unknowns. There were no clear guidelines regarding which medical conditions would be accepted or rejected and details had not been worked out. Even still, UNHCR encouraged individuals to sign up and pay the enrolment fees. Ultimately the scheme was poorly coordinated and failed. Nadia's family was enrolled in the scheme and informed me that they did not utilise it as the services were still expensive. In addition, they would have to travel across the city (a security risk) and wait for a long time in the hospital to be seen. To them, it was another failure of UNHCR to provide assistance. The family felt let down, but said they were not surprised.

In regard to livelihoods, in an interview in July, 2013, the former head of social protection as well as another protection officer expressed concern for the growing refugee population in Bangkok and the relative decrease in funding. Both acknowledged the importance of livelihood projects as a way to respond to this challenge. However, they were at a complete loss as to how to support refugees in this manner. First, they admitted to lacking knowledge as to how refugees were able to survive in the current context (see box 5.5). Refugees, especially Palestinian-Syrians were apprehensive about informing UNHCR or other service providers of their livelihoods strategies, they informed me. According to UNHCR, they were afraid it would affect their resettlement status or that the UNHCR would cut any funding they provided or may have potentially provided. Second, UNHCR struggled with their relationship with the Thai government. As it is illegal for refugees to work in Thailand, UNHCR does not want to encourage refugees to work illegally. As a result, the UNHCR did not know what support refugees needed and was unable to develop a livelihoods programme.

Box 5.5 Reality Distortion and Detachment: The Treatment of Refugees

On August 19, 2013, I attended a focus group led by a UNHCR social protection officer that took place in a classroom at the Bangkok Refugee Centre. In a focus group, refugees from the Syrian community were asked to attend to hear about the new budget cuts and provide UNHCR with insight on livelihoods strategies. Roughly 15 to 20 refugees attended. I was invited to attend by the UNHCR protection officer to better understand the livelihood situation in Bangkok. The meeting was conducted in both English and Arabic. If refugees did not speak English, a translator was used.

The representative from UNHCR explained the budget cuts and that they would not be able to provide livelihoods support as they had done previously. After this, she began to ask them about their livelihoods options. When she asked, the room fell silent. Eventually someone asked about resettlement. She avoided the question then again began to ask again about their livelihoods opportunities. They again responded by asking about resettlement. This went on for some time, her asking and them responding by asking when they would be able to leave Thailand. Finally, the participants began to express frustration. They began to discuss their issues. One man explained that they do not access the BRC because the BRC does not provide them with adequate services. They said that UNHCR does not do enough and that having refugee status does not allow you safety or ensure your rights in any capacity.

The representative became indignant and shouted, “Being a refugee allows you access to health care!” The room erupted into angry shouts in response to this. The participants obviously disagreed and they all began at once to tell stories of how UNHCR had let them down and they were forced to pay for their own health care or avoid it entirely. Each time someone attempted to tell a story, the representative would shake her head from side to side, close her eyes, and put up her hand, palm facing outward, physically demonstrating her unwillingness to listen. Eventually, the representative put up her hand and left it up to silence the group. When the room finally fell silent, she said, “the BRC will help you, at least 99 per cent of the time, if not

always." The group then became even more visibly and audibly angry and they started leaving the room one by one.

The meeting was beginning to close after this as the number of participants became sparser. A man stood and began to explain his dire situation, his lack of resources, his families' ill health. The representative again raised her hand to him and said "I do not need to hear about your family." She was clearly demonstrating to the group her unwillingness to listen; at this point the level of frustration and overt anger had reached its maximum. The man lowered his head and signalled to his wife that it was time to leave. The rest of the group filed out of the room although the meeting had not officially ended.

I met with the representative outside of the classroom and I assume I had a very shocked expression on my face. "That escalated quickly," I said. "Oh yes, that happens all of the time, you just have to stay firm with them," she said whilst shrugging as if they were dogs or unruly children.

Reality distortion was often seen by the lack of respect given to refugees. The UNHCR officer demonstrated this by treating the group of refugees as if they were less than human, silencing their concerns and acting as if those concerns were invalid. Refugees reported that they are often treated as children or animals, as if they are not capable of thinking for themselves, understanding their current circumstances, or accessing available resources. Boxes 5.5 and 5.6 demonstrate these findings. These situations also demonstrate transference and reality distortion in their responses to refugees concerns. For example, when refugees failed to access available resources, service providers transferred blame to refugees for not accessing 'available' resources.

Box 5.6 Blaming Refugees

On the second day of the APRRN consultation, refugees and service providers were given a chance to have an open discussion on the various issues regarding livelihoods and service provision. When the Vietnamese community had a chance to speak they voiced their concern regarding their inability to enrol their children in school. The representative from JRS defensively replied by saying it was because they had not reached out to JRS. The member of the Vietnamese community insisted that they had, and they had never heard back. The representative from JRS said "if you had contacted, we would have gotten your children into school." The member from the Vietnamese community shook his head slowly, eyes cast downward with a look of sheer frustration; he had been silenced and there was still no solution to his problem. This representative continued this type of silencing through most of the meeting, sending a very clear message that the NGOs were effective and had a better understanding about the refugee situation than the refugees themselves and that refugees were to blame for their current circumstances.

5.4. Informal Service Providers, Networks, and Community Support

Refugees did not trust service providers, and felt that they were not useful in helping them to meet their needs. This was partly due to the constraints placed on formal service provision by the Thai government, but also due to their own internal issues. Palestinian-Syrian refugees, therefore, had to meet their needs through other resources. The community began to do so by building networks which were accessed with the assistance of a number of individual volunteers or, what I refer to as, informal service providers. This section provides an overview of who informal service providers were, why they were more useful in the Thai context, and what they were able to accomplish. This information was obtained during time spent working with informal service providers in a number of communities and interactions during visits to the detention centre, at meetings, and at fundraisers.

5.4.1. The Informal Service Providers

Informal service providers were individuals or organisations which were not legally registered NGOs or established religious organisations. They often operated on a small scale, were privately funded, and had a tendency to work independently of both UNHCR and NGOs, although, they were often affiliated with religious and political organisations. These individuals and groups made up the informal networks which refugees used to access resources.

Below is a list of the informal service providers that provided assistance to the Palestinian-Syrian community as well as other refugee communities in Bangkok.

Clergymen, missionaries, and imams – During fieldwork I encountered numerous priests, pastors, missionaries, and other religious individuals who worked with the refugee populations. Many visited the IDC bringing food and clothing to individuals while providing religious council. Many worked to bail individuals out of the IDC. Others had started up schools, both religious and secular.

Expatriate women and women's groups – As Bangkok is an international city, there was a large group of expatriate women in Bangkok from Europe, North America, and Australia and New Zealand. Many of these women had come with their spouses, and were informally referred to as 'trailing spouses'. Many were the wives of men who work in the private sector, UN, or at various embassies. Whether, due to a lack of opportunities or the financial advantage that allows spouses to not have to enter the labour market, many spouses did not work outside of the home. Even for individuals that did work, with the low cost of child care and domestic help in Thailand, expatriates also had more free time than they were used to in their country of origin. As a result,

some women were eager to volunteer their time to do something they considered meaningful. Although there are also men in this position, it was far more common to find women volunteers. Women's groups visited families in the IDC, fundraised for NGOs, provided financial assistance to families and individuals, and ran schools and child care programmes.

Religious groups – it was also common to find religious groups, such as Thai-Muslims or Christian expatriates collecting and donating financial and food support. Some groups also visited refugee communities regularly.

Individuals – Some individuals in Bangkok had taken notice of the refugee situation independently of NGOs or other groups and offered assistance to refugees where they could. Some volunteered their time to helping as many as possible while others focused their attention on one particular family. For instance, some individuals discovered a refugee family in their neighbourhood or at their church and 'adopted' the family, assisting with rent, education, and medical care, for example. Others may have come to the attention of the issue through a church or a friend and would then regularly visit the IDC, fundraise for education institutions, or would run donation drives. Others provided work and livelihoods options, such as offering jobs in kitchens or in their homes. Most of the time it was random and individuals would respond in the way they thought could be the most beneficial.

Volunteer organisations – Individuals, such as those listed above, would identify needs and develop a network of volunteers in order to achieve a purpose. For example, the head of In Search of Sanuk formed the informal NGO in order to run small scale education programmes in slums. Overtime, the organisation grew to financially support a small number of refugee families, assist in running a school, provide technical training skills programmes, and help develop livelihood programmes. Organisations such as this were completely run by volunteers.

5.4.2. Positive Aspects and Advantages

In many ways, informal service providers delivered more efficient and useful services and were more likely to be able to assist refugees in accessing resources. First, since most volunteers did not work for a formal organisation, they were not constrained in the same way that formal organisations were constrained by the Thai government and the ensuing policies. For example, volunteers could visit the IDC, whereas NGO and UNHCR employees could not. They would often help refugees to find work in the informal market and would provide income and food support where needed. You could also find them visiting homes and forming close friendships. Second, they were not tied down by policies and were able to react to emergency situations and changing scenarios. Third, volunteers were often employed outside the humanitarian assistance

field and had a range of skill sets and connections that could be utilised. For example, volunteers were comprised of counsellors, teachers, and child care professionals, for example, and would volunteer services for free. Fourth, as volunteers only worked part-time as volunteers, the burnout rate was much lower than in formal service provision. Finally, informal service providers, due to their diverse makeup, created a network in the greater Bangkok community and allowed for refugees to access multiple resources.

Overall, informal service providers were not faced with the same internal constraints as formal service providers. Issues of overwork, burnout, transference, and other negative coping mechanisms were not used. As a result, informal service providers spent time on a day to day basis with refugees and mostly treated them as friends and equals. Through this, they were able to understand what refugees needed and, in turn, used their connections to provide resources.

5.4.3. Negative Aspects and Disadvantages

While these informal service providers did provide many advantages, some drawbacks were encountered. First, there was less accountability among informal networks. While this allowed for flexibility in service delivery it did have negative impacts. Due to a lack of any form of protection, it was possible for some informal service providers to extort or misuse donations. Stories in the community circulated widely about the actions of those purporting to help, but instead pocketed the money or used the community for political means (see box 5.7).

Box 5.7 Using the Community

Members of the community began to distance themselves from a main donor as they believed that he used the community for his own political gain. According to multiple reports, the donor asked refugees to speak out against the Syrian government on his television stations, and only then would he provide them cash assistance. Regardless of their political beliefs, many were afraid that the Syrian Government would go after their families who were still residing in Damascus, and declined to speak. According to community members, if they refused, they would receive nothing.

> *He tried to collect money from the TV* [programme]. *He collected a lot of money. With this money, he helped us to go to Cambodia to renew the 90 day stamp[43]. So we never spent money to travel to Cambodia. He always gave us the money. After the first programme, he had another programme with us, but about Syria this time, but we could only talk against the government and some of us accepted, and some of us did not accept... He said, if you want to take the money, you have to talk against the Syrian government.*
> *-Ziad*

[43] When on a non-immigrant visa, individuals have to report to immigration or leave the country every 90 days.

Second, the informal service providers were often not well coordinated with other informal or formal service providers, resulting in a lack of communication and shared information. Informal service providers understood the issues on the community level, but were not heard by formal service providers. Even when forums were organised to relay information, formal service providers did not take informal service providers very seriously. They often disregarded the information that informal service providers presented as hearsay, not being representative of the entire population, or simply inaccurate. Essentially, informal service providers tended to be much more knowledgeable of the situations in communities and the information did not make it to, or was not utilised by, the NGOs or UNHCR.

Third, volunteers came from outside of the field of humanitarian or development assistance, which in some ways presented a huge advantage and allowed for thinking outside of the box. One resulting issue, however, was that volunteers were not trained in the potential ethical issues surrounding refugees, such as confidentiality. Also, they were not always made aware of sensitive issues or may not have had experience working across cultures. In some cases this minimised their impact. For example, many volunteers would bring food items that were made of pork or were not halal for Muslims who were locked in the IDC. Eventually some of these volunteers would stop visiting because they would find out the food they brought was not eaten. Some even saying that the prisoners 'should be grateful and take what they can get.'

Fourth, many volunteers worked in full time employment and only had a limited time to donate. Fifth, as many volunteers are expatriates, their time in Bangkok was often limited to around two years. This meant that institutional memory was short and dedicated individuals left on a regular basis. Lastly, while there was not a deficiency in the number of volunteers, it often took time to find individuals with the right attitudes and skill sets.

5.4.4. Informal Networks and Services in Refugee Communities

Due to the lack of available services, many excluded and marginalized populations are forced to access informal institutions in order to survive. For refugee communities, additional factors should be considered in order to understand the implications of accessing informal networks. In addition to the struggles of everyday poverty and deprivation, refugees are dealing with PTSD and/or other psychological effects of trauma and torture. This can influence both judgement and decision making. As stated in Chapter 2, paranoia is a common symptom of PTSD, meaning that relationships can be difficult to maintain due to mistrust. In addition, individuals may lack the ability to make sound judgements and making them easy to be taken advantage of. Also, as migrants, unfamiliar with the context and the language, it is difficult to assess the sincerity in

others, making it difficult to know who one can trust. The validity of these assertions will be demonstrated and expanded upon in the following chapter.

In addition to this, from observations and interviews with both formal an informal service providers, the ability to organize and utilize social resources also depends on the situation of each refugee community, and no two are alike. For example, in the words of the head of COERR, "Each population is different and has different ways of living and coping. The Congolese for example didn't trust one another in the Congo and don't trust one another here either." As a result, the Congolese tend to be more self-reliant rather than depending on other Congolese refugees. The Vietnamese Hmong, on the other hand, had a much more structured community, with a designated leader and rely heavily on the community.

5.4.5. Networks and Resources in the Palestinian-Syrian Community

Due to a lack of resources available through formal service providers, the Palestinian-Syrian community turned to informal networks in order to survive. The community initially sought the assistance from the Thai-Muslim community, which was instrumental in building further networks so that needed resources could be accessed. While I had trouble accessing the Thai-Muslim community, I was told by Palestinian-Syrian community members that the informal service providers from the Thai-Muslim community were manly individuals and families who randomly encountered Syrians in public spaces and mosques and wanted to contribute.

When the Palestinian-Syrians came to Bangkok they settled in four different sub-communities, located in four different areas of Bangkok. These neighbourhoods included Suan Luang, Ramkanhaeng, Soem Sa-Nga, and Lad Prao and each of the sub-communities were unaware that there were other Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok. Seeking and accepting outside assistance almost immediately led to the formation of a one unified community based organisation.[44] Due to my position in the community I was able to collect data on the establishment, formation, and changing dynamics of these networks.

The three stories below demonstrate how these groups reached out to others outside of the community and then came together fortuitously to create one unified community organisation:

Mohammed, from the Ramkanhaeng community, was feeling discouraged and frustrated as he was struggling to survive. More and more families were beginning to arrive from Damascus driven by the December siege on the Yarmouk Camp. Mohammed began to contact

[44] I only interviewed community members from two of the four sub-communities, so was only able to build an understanding of how the community was formed from their perspective.

international organisations and NGOs seeking some form of assistance. He also searched online for the email address of a particularly famous advocate for Palestinians. When asked how he heard of him he said, “Everyone has heard of him, he is always on TV.” He found the advocate’s email address and the advocate responded by putting Mohammed in contact with a Palestinian rights organisation based in London.

Ahmad: Ahmad’s wife Abeer, also from the Ramkanhaeng community, was out shopping with her children after a few months of arriving in Bangkok. Abeer was approached by a Thai-Muslim woman, who Ahmad described as “a very wealthy and well connected woman.” The woman enquired if the family was from Syria and if they were refugees. Abeer exchanged numbers with this woman and the woman came to the building where they lived soon after this first meeting. The woman asked what they needed and Ahmad informed her, using Mohammed as a translator, that the whole community needed assistance with livelihoods, education, and health. The woman agreed that she would use her contacts in the Thai-Muslim community, to find a way to help. One contact was a Thai-Muslim media mogul name Rhamati.

Nadia Soon after Nadia and Amer (from the Suan Luang community) arrived in Bangkok, their mother had a heart attack and was hospitalized. After the first day the bills were so large they could no longer afford to keep her in a private hospital and were trying to have her moved to a less expensive public hospital. As mentioned previously, public hospitals tend to provide low quality medical care and are still costly to foreigners. Since they were not yet granted the status of asylum seeker or refugee from UNHCR, they received no financial assistance for this emergency.

Nadia’s daughter-in-law (Ayda) had a connection in Bangkok - a friend of a friend from Syria- a Thai Muslim woman name Maloya. When Nadia and Amer’s mother fell ill, Ayda contacted Maloya on Facebook, asking if she could help them. Maloya contacted a friend of hers, Rhamati (mentioned above), and asked him if he could help. Rhamati came to the hospital, met the family and promised to pay the bill. He told the family to keep her in the private hospital and not to move her. After she passed away a few days later he helped them to make funeral arrangements and settled the bills.

In late April, according to Mohammed, a man named Abdul[45] from the London based Palestinian rights organisation flew from London to Bangkok to try and assist the growing number of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok. Abdul had some connections within the Thai-Muslim

[45] Name changed

community, which is how he was aware of all four refugee sub-communities, and organised a meeting with Rhamati, the Thai media mogul, and Tarek, a Palestinian-Jordanian businessman who lived in Bangkok. The meeting was also attended by two representatives from each of the four sub-communities in Bangkok. Ahmad and Mohammed represented the Ramkhamhaeng community and Nadia's husband and her eldest son Faruk represented the Suan Luang community[46]. Until the day of the meeting both Mohammed and Faruk reported that they had no idea the other groups from Suan Luang or Lad Prao existed in Bangkok at that time, until he attended the meeting.

Using the Community Organisation to Strengthen Networks and Access Resources

The first order of the group was to identify the needs of the community and the best way in which to meet those needs. The group decided that the best way in which to do so was to form a well-organised community that could advocate on behalf of its own rights, set up fundraising mechanisms, and seek out livelihoods opportunities. Most individuals were concerned about finances and livelihoods options at that time and felt that this community organisation could be a useful tool. According to Mohammed, the group came together easily because Palestinians, being born as refugees, are used to relying on other Palestinians for support (This idea of Palestinian collective resilience is also discussed in Chapter 4).

> Because they [formal institutions] did not help us, [because] we did not have an embassy, we don't have anything. But members of the community can go out and help [each other].
>
> - Mohammed

As a group, the members of the organisation had two major aims. The first was to advocate UNHCR to prioritise Palestinian-Syrian cases. The feeling in the community was that the UNHCR was taking too long in the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and resettlement processes. The logic amongst the community was that, as Palestinians, they were already refugees, so the RSD process was redundant, and they should be streamlined to the resettlement phase. Each member of the group was tasked to make contacts with anyone they thought might be helpful. "Our first order of business," according to Mohammed, "was to show UNHCR that we are here." The second was to gain the attention of the Thai-Muslim community and local businesses in order to build networks that would help them to access to resources. Both aims were to be accomplished through one strategy; to publicise their situation.

[46] I had no close connections to individuals who lived in Lad Prao or Soem Sa-Nga and did not know their representatives

The group began making contacts with embassies, started a Facebook page, contacted journalists, and Rhamati, the owner of Muslim Television stations, created a television programme to gain the attention of Thai-Muslims. The Facebook page caught the attention of the head of the local chapter of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC), a Swedish man named Stewart. He offered the resources of the PSC and individuals such as Faruk and his family began attending meetings of the club. By September, the PSC had helped the Community to organize an event at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, where the community could publicize their issues and problems and advocate on their own behalf. Media outlets such as BBC, Al Jazeera, and the Bangkok Post attended the event. The ambassadors from Malaysia and South Africa attended as well.

Through networking, the television programmes, and other media such as news articles, the community began to accomplish their goals; donations poured into the condo at Suan Luang and Ramkanhaeng. According to Jihad, Ahmad, Ziad and Faruk, the Thai-Muslim community donated enough food and money so that each family member did not want for anything for all of Ramadan. After the September event, a number of individuals began to contact the community to ask how they could help. For example, a woman named Kanta began working with the community when she saw them on the TV. She was a close friend to Rhamati and called him to see if she could help any of the families. She offered support and became extremely instrumental in bailing families out of the IDC.

The community met with the Ambassadors to Malaysia and South Africa. Both embassies provided financial support to the communities. The South African ambassador said she would work further with them, but the relationship was short lived, according to Jihad. However the Malaysian Embassy did continue offering support for some time to certain families in Suan Luang.

Education

As education is a top priority in the community, in the Ramkanhaeng condo Jihad worked with the established networks to create a school. He worked with the Thai Muslim community to find teachers in the building and outside of the community to teach Maths, English, Arabic, and the Quran. They found a Christian missionary who taught English. According to Mohammad, the community members ‘were very happy because he was a native English speaker and he did not take a salary.’ The Thai-Muslim community helped them by raising money through donations. They used the funds to rent a room in the condo for the school and to buy desks and supplies; ‘we made a good room, it was very nice,’ Jihad reported.

At Suan Luang, Faruk and others created a similar school based off of the same model. They recruited a Burmese neighbour, who was a trained teacher in Burma and had moved to Bangkok with her brother. She taught for free, as her brother's salary at an international school was sufficient to support them. The school that her brother taught at was owned by Hosne, the Jordanian-Palestinian man (who was married to a member of the Thai-Muslim community). Through Hosne and the school, donations were raised to buy supplies.

Health

Rhamati recruited doctors and nurses to come to Ramkanhaeng to provide medical check-ups. He also worked with the Thai Red Cross and asked them to go out to the communities to provide health services. In the case of a medical emergency, Rhamati and other members of the Thai-Muslim community created a fund to provide assistance as well.

In regard to mental health, members of the Thai-Muslim community visited regularly, helping to increase morale in the community. Members of the Thai-Muslim community would take children to the local amusement park, created events and activities for them, and brought books and toys. Because of this, people felt cared for and supported, generally improving their psychological wellbeing.

Security

Formal service providers could not provide any assistance in the domain of security, but informal service providers could visit the IDC, and many collaborated in order to convince the government to bail out families. As stated earlier in this chapter, the bail process became exceedingly difficult and a wide reaching network became necessary to be able to bail out the families from the IDC. Mr. Kijja, a regular member of the PSC met the Palestinian-Syrian community and began to regularly visit the IDC. He identified the families that required bail and began negotiations with the personnel at the IDC to begin the bail process. However, they were reluctant to release anyone since the military coup had occurred. Kijja then contacted Kanta, knowing that she had some connections to the IDC due to her family. Kanta contacted the IDC and they agreed to let her bail out one family and Kanta agreed to bail out Ahmad's wife Abeer and children. Kijja then contacted Rhamati and persuaded him to Rhamati to provide the 150,000 THB for the bail. It was through this network that bail was even possible since JRS and TCR were no longer partaking in the bailment process. Nasir and Alaa's family were eventually bailed out through the collaborated efforts of Kijja, Kanta, and Hosne. They also set a precedent and made the bail process easier and more lenient for other refugees.

Since TCR had originally advocated the Thai government to allow bail, the process had become more and more strict. Initially, to be bailed out detainees needed asylum status and a letter from UNHCR, a guarantor, and 50,000 THB. However, over time, the IDC became aware of the fact that some asylum seekers were denied refugee status or were taking several years to be resettled. The Thai government therefore changed the policy so that individuals had to have obtained refugee status in order to be bailed. Over time, individuals needed an invitation from a third country for resettlement, until finally refugees needed an actual plane ticket from the third country in order to bail out. However, Kanta was able to convince the personnel of the IDC to allow the first and second family to bail out without a letter from UNHCR. After this, Kijja was able to bail out a third family without a letter from UNHCR that did not have a resettlement country lined up yet. Since then a large number of asylum seekers and refugees have been bailed out by a Catholic Priest.

As a direct result, the refugee families felt safer and more secure. During the time that bail was not possible, many refugees were too afraid to leave their homes, knowing that if they were arrested they would be in detention until resettlement, up to three years or more.

Members from the Thai-Muslim community, as well as other informal service providers including religious groups, women's groups, and independent volunteers, regularly visited Palestinian-Syrian refugees who were arrested and detained in the IDC. Visitors brought food, hygiene products, and clean water. This was extremely important for children because the IDC does not provide sufficient nutrients for children.

Employment

The community organization worked to not only provide financial assistance by collecting donations, but was also useful in helping individuals find employment. When members of the organization became aware of jobs they would put the word out in the community that there was a job available. Members of the community who felt that they were qualified could then apply. The organization also made contacts with individuals who could potentially offer employment. Mr. Kijja, was an example of an important asset of the Palestinian-Syrian community as he hired many Palestinian-Syrians in the pharmaceutical company he managed. He was able to get three of the men valid visas and work permits and employed four full-time, including Ibrahim and two of Nadia's children. He also offered ad hoc work as much as possible. For example, Mr. Kijja offered Amer a job installing a filtration system. According to Mr. Kijja, he not only felt bad for the community, but thought they could be helpful in the business as his company did business in Yemen and he had no Arabic speaking employees.

Implications for the Community

What the above description shows is that informal service providers can be highly effective in helping refugees to help themselves. They are able to access areas in which formal service providers are restricted and work closely with refugees, allowing them to more insight and opportunity to assist. These informal service providers were instrumental in helping refugees to access basic resources.

Most importantly, informal service providers were effective because they often approached the Palestinian-Syrian community without preconceived ideas of what refugees needed. Instead of pushing programmes and ideas onto the community, they simply asked the community what it needed and helped them to access these resources. Due to this, refugees were able to access their basic needs and the resources they needed to be well. They also felt empowered which led to a sense of dignity and community. However, this strategy to achieve wellbeing was only short lived due to a number of obstacles. The next chapter examines the obstacles faced in sustaining networks. The purpose of the next chapter is to analyse the many strategies employed, including such strategies as creating networks, and the outcomes and implications for wellbeing.

5.5. Service Providers and the Implications for Wellbeing

Overall, due to the constrained context described above, refugees were presented with limited options and felt that formal service providers were unable to assist in accessing resources. The community reported that JRS and AAT were of no help and even offered conflicting information and legal advice. The entire community gave up attempting to access resources through NGOs. “We do not talk about [the NGOs] in the community. They say they can help, but we know they cannot… We do not believe in JRS,” Ibrahim confided. According to him, the community was only really concerned with UNHCR because their future depended on the organisation. Nasir expressed similar sentiments about NGOs, when discussing a meeting he had with AAT, “they are no help,” he said, “no one helps.” Amer also felt that the NGOs are not capable of helping, “I do not want anything from them; I just want to travel faster.”

As a result the community faced a lack of what was needed to be well in all four domains of wellbeing. This of course, had major implications for their ability to be well. The implications were seen after the disbandment of the community organisation (which will be discussed in Chapter 6).

5.5.1. Implications of the Context and Formal Service Providers on the Domains of Wellbeing

Education

Each family made mention of the lack of access to education for their children on almost a daily basis. After God, most families believed education to be the single most important aspect of a child's life. During daily visits families expressed a deep sense of loss on behalf of their children.

> It is the biggest disaster for me that my children are without education. Maybe the kids lost three years of their lives, just sitting.
> - Ahmad

Due to the value they placed on education, many felt as if their children were actually wasting years of their lives by not having access to education.

> Mohammed lost three years of his life. While he should be in school, he is playing downstairs, not doing anything, he lost three years of his life.
> - Nadia

They left Syria to provide a better life for their children, but felt a constant sense of guilt, frustration, and even a deep sense of grief because they have not been able to do so.

Security

Fear, due to lack of security, became a predominant emotion in the daily lives of refugees after an immigration raid occurred in the Ramkanheang building and Mohammed and seven others were arrested and sent to the IDC.

> I think all the people were a little worried. I overstayed, and like everyone else, I was worried. But after a year, I stopped thinking about it. No one touched me, no one asked for paper work. By now I was a recognised refugee with UNHCR, and my file was finished because I had refugee status and I had my interview with the Dutch embassy. I thought immigration would not touch me, would not take me. Especially since I already had my interview with the Dutch embassy.
>
> But after the raid on Sunday everyone was afraid…That same night everyone went to sleep out of the apartment.
> - Mohammed

After the raid and as visas began to expire, it became clear that members of the community could and would be taken to the IDC, the community members were much more tense and afraid and did not feel that they were safe. They felt anyone could call immigration at any moment and there was nothing they could do about it. Amer, Nadia, Ziad, and Ibrahim felt that they were completely insecure and that no one could protect them.

> I used to think you could bargain with immigration, but no, no there is no safety at all. There are 60 of us in this building, so the relationship with the neighbourhood is not very good. The children are noisy so the neighbours get angry, "why are they making noise?" One time two children were fighting, one was Arabic and the other was Thai, and a man was about to bring immigration to the condo but I convinced him not to, and said "we will do whatever you want." But I was legal then; I would be too scared to stand up to him now.
>
> No one would help us, they might even call immigration on us. While I am talking to you, I am constantly thinking about this, I can't stop. I feel very stressed about this, because we don't know. For me, I can control myself. I will not cause any problems here. I will not get a complaint, but I cannot control the people around me. And if I move out of my condo, away from the other Syrians to another place where I don't know my neighbours it might be safer. But maybe my new neighbours will see the hijab of my wife he will go to the police and say that we are foreigners here. It isn't safe anywhere.
>
> - Ziad

Refugees lived in a constant state of insecurity, and did not feel that they could trust anyone. They were afraid of their neighbours, the authorities, and other refugees. They felt that they have no control of the situation, did not know who they could trust and had no one to turn to for help. The ever present fear of immigration acted as a major impediment to the achievement of wellbeing. It interfered with their ability to live well within the community, build bonds, and relax. As discussed in Chapter 2, this level of stress and anxiety interferes with the memory, focus, and concentration and leads to increased paranoia and physiological problems.

Health

Due to a lack of access, many refugees did not engage in preventative health checks, and would only seek health care when they had significant health issues or not at all. For example, when I returned for a visit in December 2015, Nadia had lost the majority of her hair and had a large mass growing out of the side of her head. I asked if she had been to a doctor and she said they could not afford one and she would wait until they were resettled.

Mental Health

Because of the conditions in which refugees found themselves, prolonged psychological problems were rampant in the community. The most common psychological problems the community displayed were stress, depression, and paranoia. Prolonged stress was characterised by sleep disorders, anxiety, rumination and worry, chronic fatigue, and irritability. Individuals showed signs of depression which included thoughts of suicide. Finally, paranoia was demonstrated through an almost irrational lack of trust for any and all community members.

> I have wanted to kill myself since we arrived in Thailand. That was the hardest thing I have ever passed.
> - Ahmad
>
> My son (age 7) called me from the IDC and told me he hopes he will die soon.
> - Ahmad
>
> My son (age 6) has psychological problems. He wants to get a pipe and beat Faruk. He talks about it all of the time.
> - Amer
>
> I have psychological problems now, I cannot trust anyone.
> - Amer
>
> The lawyers keep telling me I have psychological problems, they say I am paranoid. I just miss my wife. My heart is broken.
> - Nasir

These mental health issues, eventually became a direct cause of exacerbated physical health problems. Due to long time exposure to stress, anxiety, and a lack of sleep, individuals suffered from a number of physiological issues. Individuals were more likely to fall ill with common illnesses such as flus, colds, and coughs. When individuals fell ill there was a lack of options; either UNHCR would not pay to cover the costs or they could not afford to seek help, exacerbating medical issues.

- Ayda was unhealthily thin from over work and stress. She hardly ate, hardly sat down, smoked cigarettes without pause, and was constantly taking care of something in the house. She suffered a miscarriage, reported to be in constant pain, regularly suffered from the flu and other illnesses, and was regularly too tired to speak to me on visits.
- Nadia threw up constantly and has issues with digestion, an illness that has developed in Thailand. This has led to the loss of her teeth.
- Ziad passed out in the shower for 25 minutes and was rushed to the hospital. The doctor told him it was caused by stress. “I am 25 years old, not 75 years old, and maybe I appear 25 but inside I am 70, because of the stories I have heard.”
- Ahmad had a thyroid problem and could not afford to get treatment. He thought his thyroid condition was causing him to lose his temper and not sleep. In addition to this, Ahmad suffered extreme pain in his lower back. He went to the hospital and they told him he has anxiety issues. They gave him medicine, but he feels he ‘cannot recover, I cannot even make a fist and I am constantly shaking.’

Livelihoods

Refugees were under constant stress due to the lack of financial resources available and feel constantly insecure. This led to a lack of sleep and increased and prolonged stress levels as they were continually considering what they should and could do to make ends meet.

> I think about everything: How will we pay the rent? How will we pay the electricity and water? And, how can we afford supplies for cooking? I was afraid that if something happened to a member of my family, like, if they become sick, what will I do in that situation?
>
> Maybe what worries me is the financial situation; there are not good jobs for my kids and we struggle to cover everything, to cover our needs. I think "what if in one month or in any month that the real estate manager will knock on the door and ask for the rent and we won't have it. What will we do? Will he kick out me and my kids? I think about the health care, what if something very bad happens? What will I do? What will we do?
> - Nadia

The ability for the male head of household to sustain a livelihood is an important factor for achieving and maintaining wellbeing in the Palestinian-Syrian culture. However, most families live in dire conditions and struggle to make ends meet, not being able to access work. This left families feeling helpless and a loss of dignity for male heads of household.

Abandonment and Fear

Palestinian-Syrian refugees not only felt that service providers were incompetent, they felt as if they were treated like animals by service providers, and that they were forgotten and abandoned. They also felt that they had no control over their lives and had no one to ask for help. The level of detachment exercised by UNHCR also created a lack of transparency and communication, which had consequences on the overall wellbeing of refugees. For example, UNHCR was slow to return phone calls, rarely used email or text messaging, and did not share information about the status of cases with refugees. Ziad reported that when he called UNHCR to ask about his case, he was informed by UNHCR that it was not his right to be resettled, therefore he had no right to ask about his own case. When they answered the phone at UNHCR, according to Ibrahim and other community members they say "'we do not want your name, just your number.' We are just a number to them. They are so negative. All of UNHCR is so negative with us."

Lack of and negative communication with refugees means that refugees were constantly confused and creating conspiracy theories about the ways in which UNHCR and other service providers function. Refugees, as a result, tended to regard UNHCR with suspicion and made

UNHCR into a villain. According to Amer, for example, he felt that he could not trust UNHCR. He felt that they were dishonest about their system and treated people unfairly.

> UNHCR always says there is a queue, but I don't think so. There is no system. For instance, we arrived ten days after my sister, but she got the status two months before me, there is two months difference, but only 10 days difference between our arrival dates.
> - Amer

While the community was waiting for UNHCR to process their case, they felt that their future was in UNHCR's hands, they felt powerless and dehumanised by UNHCR due to this lack of power. Ahmad reported that he was afraid of the UNHCR. He was afraid of the power they had over everyone. He worried that if he said the wrong thing or called too much he would anger them and they would close his file.

Many expressed frustration and felt that they are not treated with respect by UNHCR. Ahmad once said, "they have taken my pride, they treat us like animals." One man in the IDC, a former UN employee in Syria, was arrested at the airport flying from Krabi (a province in southern Thailand). He had a legitimate visa but the immigration officials refused to honour it. He tried to get in touch with the UNHCR and they did not help him. He said next time he would call the World Wildlife Foundation or an animal rights NGO, "since I have been reduced to the status of an animal, maybe they will help me."

Refugees felt abandoned by UNHCR, which was mainly caused by a lack of information and transparency. To refugees, it looked as if UNHCR was being purposefully malicious, neglectful, or simply incompetent, leaving refugees to feel that they had no one on their side and now one they could turn to. This generally led to a state of confusion, over thinking, and a lack of dignity.

Overall, very few services were available to the Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok, and those which were, were not relevant or useful. As a result, the Palestinian-Syrian community, had little to no faith regarding formal service provision. Generally, formal service providers were not accessed for assistance and when individuals attempted to do so, overwhelmingly, the result according to them, was unsatisfactory and often insulting. The overall negative treatment of refugees had a lasting impact on refugees' wellbeing and wellbeing strategies as individuals were made to feel helpless and forgotten. After some time, many turned away from formal service providers knowing that they would not be able or would be seen as unwilling to assist them.

5.5.2. Informal Service Providers, Community, and Wellbeing

As a result of the above implications, the community formed a community organisation. The community organisation was useful in helping the Palestinian-Syrian community achieve wellbeing. The strong sense of community, as well as the support and security that the community organization provided, had positive impacts on the wellbeing of the members of the community. It helped the community achieve material wellbeing, for example. According to Nadia, her family would not be able to survive without donations and the connections which have allowed her children to find work. According to Ahmad, at this time individuals would not have to 'spend a penny from their own pocket." From the support of others, all expenditures including food and rent, were covered and individuals had a sense of security. Families felt a sense of security, felt that they were providing opportunities for their children, and were making use of their skills.

Perhaps more importantly, the community organisation fostered a feeling of closeness and friendship. According to Ahmad, "When we were unified, we felt like we were one family. We loved each other, we took care of each other." According to Ziad, the community was very close, "it was very good. Every day we met and drank tea together and had lunch or breakfast and went to search for a job together. It was very good here and a very social life."

My first visit to the Palestinian-Syrian community, to Suan Luang, in early October 2013 revealed a strong sense of community. Sitting for hours in the home of Nadia and her children, the many Palestinian-Syrians that lived in the building came in and out, sharing stories and having lunch and tea together. The community organization was functioning well at this time, most individuals I encountered were more or less financially stable, had some access to health care, and the children were attending the non-formal school in the condo.

During the visit, they discussed business models for making and selling bread and starting a catering business. The mood was optimistic and they were extremely pleased at how they were able to survive. They even reported that they were proud, and said that they had done this by working together. They had seen how other refugee communities were coping and were proud at how they were managing. Dwight, the head of In Search of Sanuk, accompanied me on the first visit. Even after having worked with refugee communities for nearly five years in Bangkok, he informed me that he had never seen a community functioning so well.

This time period, presents a sharp contrast between informal and formal service provision and shows that the policies of service providers toward refugees can contribute greatly to the overall

objective and subjective wellbeing of refugees. In this refugee community, not only were individuals struggling to survive but they were left feeling helpless and powerless as they faced daily challenges due to both the lack of resources and the poor treatment by service providers. Due to this, individuals were forced to turn to alternative and non-formal networks in order to survive. These alternatives, in many ways were seen as more beneficial. Those who provided informal assistance were more effective, as they are not faced with the same institutional constraints as the formal service providers. The informal service providers, for example, could more easily fundraise, offer jobs- even though refugees cannot legally work, and could more quickly react to emerging needs. Informal providers could also more easily identify and assist as they were often closely connected with the communities and understood the daily challenges. Informal service providers were also positively impacted the wellbeing of refugees by empowering the community. They did this by providing the community a voice and a platform to express their concerns and also by assisting in helping individuals attain a dignified livelihood. These outcomes are exactly the opposite to the policies of formal service providers which involve the silencing of refugees voices and the perpetuation of refugees as a helpless victims.

Overall, a positive sense of wellbeing experienced by the Palestinian-Syrian community as a whole was attributed to the community organization and the resulting sense of financial security. In addition, at this time, there was a strong sense of unity in the community that contributed to an overall improvement in wellbeing. However, this respite is short lived as the community organisation begins to fall apart. Distrust is planted like a seed, grows, and takes over. As this begins to take place there is a significant and noticeable difference in the wellbeing of individuals and the community as a whole. Additionally, as the community begins to divide, strategies begin to change at the household level as they are faced with new issues and further uncertainty. These strategies lead to further rifts and exacerbates issues in the community. This will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I analyse the context in which the Palestinian-Syrian refugees were confined. Refugees were unable to access the resources they needed to be well due to the constrained situation in which they found themselves. The institutional conditions of Thailand have led to the creation of exclusionary practices, where Thailand has actively sought to deter refugees from entry, ensuring non-integration of those who enter, and attempting to discourage refugees from seeking asylum in Thailand. In order to create an adverse environment, Thailand limits the ability of refugees to access sufficient and sustainable livelihoods strategies, security, health, and

education. The Thai government also limits the reach of service providers, making operation in Thailand difficult.

The domains of wellbeing and how these values manifested themselves in everyday life, required a number of resources, such as the right to work, the right to access health care, the right to education, and so on. Table 5.4 below shows the domains of wellbeing, which are discussed in Chapter 4, and the highlights the aspired outcomes versus the actual outcomes based on the institutional climate described, i.e. what wellbeing should look like versus the actual situation.

Table 5.4 Aspired v. Actual Wellbeing Outcomes

Domains of Wellbeing	**Aspired Outcomes - Wellbeing**	**Actual Outcomes - Wellbeing Failures**
Education	Well educated individuals and families, learned skills, children attending schools	Children are out of school for 3 to 5 years, individuals are not learning new skills, degrees are interrupted
Security and protection	Safe environment, legal recourse, protection from physical harm	Living in constant fear of others, afraid of authorities, afraid to leave homes, afraid of the community
Health (including mental health)	Receiving quality health care, to live a healthy life, to feel securely part of the community, to have trust, mitigation/alleviation of psychological issues brought on by the conflict/refugee experience	Regularly ill, unable to seek medical care, afraid of injury due to inability to meet the cost, untreated psychological disorders which manifest in physiological conditions, lack of trust in community/family, lack of support systems
Livelihoods	Providing for the family, secure income, utilisation of skill sets, dignified working environment, fair treatment from employers, sufficient living conditions	Lack of work, non-utilisation of skills and education, exploitation in the workplace, low standard of living, unhealthy living spaces

What we can see from this table is that the Palestinian-Syrian refugees were not able to achieve wellbeing under the institutional climate and context. The resources they needed to be well were not accessible and the outcomes were dire. Due to this, refugees were constantly stressed and over thinking, further exacerbating their condition. This resulted in a number of psychological issues which manifested in physiological issues.

The situation was made worse by the poor treatment of refugees by Thai authorities and the formal service providers. Refugees were afraid of Thai authorities, who could act with impunity,

committing coercion and theft. Refugees could be arrested at any time, a thought that occupied, for most, every waking hour, interfering with their ability to focus or reduce stress levels.

For a short time period, the community was able to organise and work towards the actualisation of their values and were able to meet many of their needs. However, in the end the programmes implemented by service providers were insufficient and difficult to access, leaving refugees feeling unsupported. This was due to a number of constraints placed on the service providers, as well as their internal policies and practices. However, organisations failed to communicate with refugees and they therefore viewed service providers as incompetent, controlling, and malicious and were left feeling abandoned and grossly mistreated.

Overall, the barriers refugees faced were too extreme for refugees to achieve wellbeing. The next chapter will build an understanding of how Palestinian-Syrian refugees attempted to overcome these barriers and unsuccessfully attempted to use their agency to achieve wellbeing through varying strategies within this context.

Chapter 6 Strategies, Trade-offs, and the Community

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 analysed and developed an understanding of the structures and institutions which created the context in which refugees found themselves. It also built an understanding of the subsequent impediments to the achievement of wellbeing in specific domains, such as education, health care, security, and livelihoods. Although the context is adverse and difficult, members of the Palestinian-Syrian refugee community actively employed strategies in order to attempt to overcome barriers to survive and to access what was needed. Viewing wellbeing as a process, not something that is static in nature, this chapter will specifically analyse the wellbeing strategies employed and the associated coping mechanisms.

Ideally, the urban context provides a number of opportunities as opposed to the limiting conditions of refugee camps, such as poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities, and the resulting psychological issues (Ward, 2014). Refugees are drawn to cities due to social and economic factors, resettlement programmes, and the opportunity to live a more dignified life (Grabska, 2006; Marfleet, 2007; Sommers, 2001; Ward, 2014). However, urban areas can become centres of great exclusion, where 'outsiders' must live in the margins where they 'devise strategies to avoid notice and survive' (Grabska, 2006; Sommers, 2001: 347). 'Urban settings in developing countries pose dramatic challenges for survival' (Grabska, 2006: 289), and, as can be seen from Chapter 5, these challenges are difficult to mitigate based on the current programmes and policies in place. As a result, refugees are dependent on their own resilience and resourcefulness for survival, and are forced to meet their needs through locating and accessing a wide variety of sources (Grabska, 2006; Hoffstaedter, 2015; Palmgren, 2013).

The purpose of this chapter is to build an understanding of the strategies utilised by the Palestinian-Syrian community within the urban context of Bangkok, Thailand, where they not only attempted to survive, but attempted to achieve wellbeing. In order to examine these strategies, we must understand that human dignity and values cannot be separated from material needs and livelihoods strategies. As noted in Chapter 2, livelihoods are not only what people 'have and control' but also include 'what people think and do' (Gough, et al., 2007: 18). Essentially, livelihoods decisions are part of a continuous process based on a number of factors, including capacities, values, and aspirations, with a desired outcome in mind.

The Figure 6.1 (taken from Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2), provides a visual demonstration of wellbeing as a both a process and an outcome. However, what this diagram does not show is the complex process of adjusting aspirations and expectations when faced with significant barriers.

Figure 6.1 – Personal Wellbeing – Outcomes and Strategies

Figure 6.2 provides a more detailed visual representation of wellbeing by showing the iterative relationship between wellbeing as a process and as an outcome, specifically when strategies are met with overwhelming challenges and result in wellbeing failures. The diagram demonstrates that when strategies are met by challenges and failures, people will be forced to adapt and adjust expectations and make trade-offs. People will then employ new wellbeing strategies based on these adjustments. The diagram also shows that, over time, due to these adjustments and trade-offs, their overall wellbeing will diminish. This is in line with the literature review in Chapter 2. Cummings et al. (2009) as well as Diener and Biswas-Diener (2001) show that when individuals are subjected to challenges, they will experience a decrease in wellbeing. Individuals are able to recover only if they are able to cope with challenges. When faced with an abundance of obstacle and challenges, they cannot maintain wellbeing homeostasis.

Figure 6.2 – Wellbeing Strategies – Adapting to Failures and Challenges

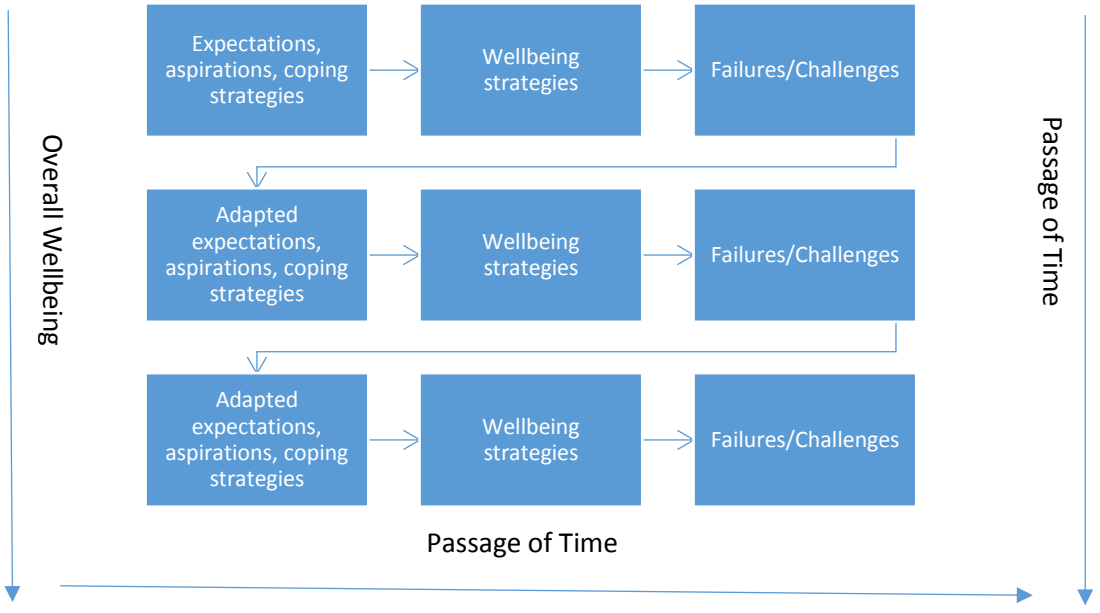
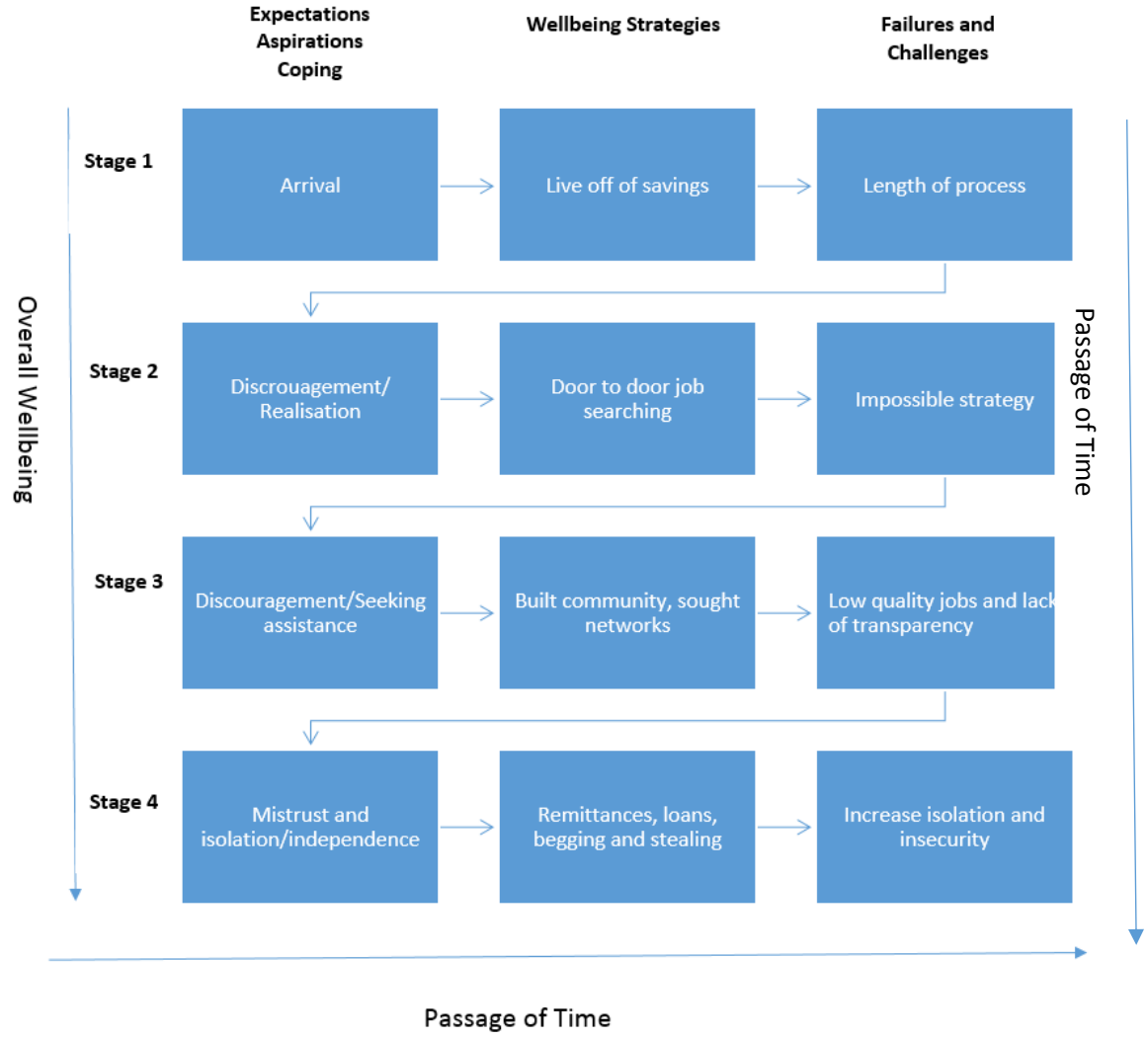


Figure 6.3 shows the process that Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok experienced. Over the course of their time in Bangkok, the refugee community experienced four stages of this process: 1) arrival, 2) developing a greater understanding of the situation, 3) seeking assistance/community organisation, and 4) isolation and independent strategies.

Figure 6.3 – Wellbeing Strategies of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok – Adapting to Wellbeing Failures



The above diagram shows a succession of wellbeing failures many of which could be attributed to a number of missing requisites, such as trust, transparency, and psychological stability. Prolonged psychological stress and the exposure to trauma, as described in Chapter 2, had implications for the strategies which were adopted. Essentially, individuals in the community began to create narratives and renegotiate meanings in an attempt to make sense of and cope with their current situation. These narratives, in turn, created a number of incompatible perceptions of reality within the community, which created further rifts.

This chapter is important as it shows how the relational aspects of wellbeing affect all outcomes, allowing us to understand wellbeing as 'something that belongs to and emerges through relationships with others' (White, 2015: 29). The chapter builds an understanding of how relationships with others can both help and hinder wellbeing strategies and their outcomes. This evidence will allow a better understanding of how concentrating on the needs of the group, rather than the individual, can provide more efficient services and a better quality of life for refugees in urban areas.

This chapter also serves the purpose of building an understanding of how refugees attempt to attain material wellbeing while hidden in the urban landscape. This information is mostly unknown to service providers and researchers alike:

> *"Why don't they just feel lucky to work and take on any job?"*
> – The head of Catholic Organisation for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR)[47].

This lack of understanding led many service providers to believe that refugees should partake in whatever livelihood strategy is most easily available without considering their own values, culture, or self-worth. This understanding allows us insight as to why refugees make certain choices even though some of the choices may seem irrational or self-defeating. As a result, we can begin to see that refugees ultimately attempted to find a balance between achieving their basic needs and living within their value system as they were faced with insurmountable obstacles.

6.1.1 Chapter Organisation

The chapter will analyse the four stages as shown in Figure 6.3 demonstrating Palestinian-Syrians' negotiation and navigation of the situation, the challenges they encountered, and the resulting wellbeing failures. For each stage (arrival, developing a greater understanding, seeking/accepting assistance, and isolation) I will examine expectations, strategies, the challenges faced, and the resulting wellbeing failures. The chapter concludes by discussing some of the positive coping strategies which community members employed. Although these strategies were not sufficient to achieve wellbeing, it shows the resilience of community members and their ability to hold on to hope throughout an increasingly difficult time.

[47] 26/08/2013

6.2. Stage 1: Arrival

6.2.1. Expectations and Strategies upon Arrival

During the first stage, when refugees arrived in Bangkok, the families believed that their time in Bangkok would last only a few months and that they would be resettled only after a short wait, or that the war would end and they would go back to Syria. For example, Ziad and Reema came to Bangkok with only enough money to survive three or four months, it was the only money they had between them. They were told by Nadia's family (Nadia's daughter in-law, Ayda, is a relative of Reema and put Ziad and Faruk in touch) that it would only be 3 to 4 months at maximum. Mohammed, Amer, and Nadia all came without a long term strategy or plans for income generation as they only expected to stay a few months.

> We made no plans, because the news was very good; after 3 or 4 months you would travel to Canada or Australia. We thought it through and we were afraid, but for me the main goal in my head was to go out of Syria.
> - Ziad

> We knew of UNHCR and we knew we would go to another country, to Europe, to America… I thought we would go… or that the war would finish and we could go back, maybe the fighting would be one month, two months…
> - Mohammed

Families began to settle in and most felt a sense of calm and relief; they had escaped Syria and thought their situation in Thailand was temporary. Nadia, for example, reported that she felt calm because she knew her family was "safe from bombs and bullets." Ahmad, Amer, and Mohammed reported a similar feeling of relief and safety for their family. This feeling was short lived for each; over the course of the days and weeks to follow they began to realise they would be in Thailand for longer than they had anticipated. Families were not prepared for the shocks to follow, either psychologically or financially.

6.2.2. Challenges and Failures

When Mohammed first visited the UNHCR an officer took the time to meet with him, something that did not normally happen at the time of registration. Mohammed attributed this meeting to the fact that his family was the first of the Palestinian-Syrian community to arrive. During that visit they informed him that it would take six months to receive refugee status and at least a year to be resettled after that. Mohammed became overwhelmed, afraid, and discouraged:

> I asked them, 'what are you doing to me, how can I live here for 6 months? I don't know anybody, how can I live? I don't have enough money to survive'…They gave me the contact details of some of the NGOs and said, 'Maybe they can help you; we can't do anything about this appointment, it is in 6 months.'

- Mohammed

Mohammed felt shock when he discovered that Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and resettlement would be such a long process. He was astounded and frustrated; “I was born a refugee, how do I have to become a refugee again? My passport even says I am a refugee.”

For Nadia’s family, the UNHCR officer did not meet with them when they came to the office as they had with Mohammed, so they had no idea how long the resettlement process would take. Instead, over the course of four months, they slowly began to realise that the process would require that they remain in Thailand much longer than anyone one of them had imagined.

> When we went to UNHCR we saw a lot of people standing outside of the UNHCR, and we asked them how we register, and they told us we had to register with the officer and he gave us applications. We filled them and put them in the box, the officer said nothing to us, and after 4 months they called us in for an interview… We kept asking ourselves if UNHCR forgot us. We think they did, but we weren’t able to do anything about it… We called many times, they said we were in a queue… But, if they forgot us, there was nothing we could have done, because we can’t go back to Syria, we have nowhere to go.
> - Nadia

Essentially Nadia’s family had no idea what was happening and were very anxious, talking amongst themselves each day, not knowing how long it would take. Over time, it began to slowly occur to them that the process would take much longer than they had thought. It was this slow realisation that caused them all heightened anxiety over the course of this time period. They had no idea if they would hear from UNHCR and what they should do while they waited.

Ziad and Reema found out that they would stay longer through rumours circulating in the community and began to worry about what they would do.

> When we arrived here, we started to hear stories, like ‘you will wait for one year or 1.5 years.’ This was a shock for us…The opportunities for work are very limited.
> - Ziad

Amer rushed to Bangkok from Syria because his sister, Nadia, told him that the UNHCR office would close down. He and his mother were under the impression that they would spend six months in Bangkok, until they were informed that it would be much longer before they were able to be resettled. Amer was also shocked and worried:

> They said it would be at least six months to get the refugee status, I became shocked… I thought ‘I don’t have enough money, I only have money for six months.’ Then they delayed me for two and half months to get an interview. I have been here 1 year and 5 months now. I am waiting for the resettlement interview until now. They still not have done it.
> - Amer

Ahmad was, according to him, 'extremely wealthy in Syria' and did not think about having enough money in Thailand, however after he found out how long it would take to be resettled, he began to experience, in his words, "a lot of anxiety" and a loss of independence and dignity.

> Because I cannot speak English, I cannot communicate. I feel disabled, I have to ask my friends for help… The person who speaks English is the person who helps me, whoever he is.
> - Ahmad

Overall, families came to Bangkok thinking that their time there was limited from three to six months. Their strategy was to live off of saved money until they were safely in third countries and just keep their heads down and wait. All were extremely shocked to find that the time would be significantly longer and none were prepared for this. This became their first major obstacle, and led to their first adjustment in strategies.

6.3. Stage 2: Understanding the Costs and Looking for Work in Bangkok

6.3.1. Expectations: Cost of Living

The seemingly low cost of living in Bangkok was one of the considerations for seeking asylum in Thailand. The cost of living in Bangkok can vary significantly depending on a number of factors, but, overall it is possible to live minimally at a low cost (relative to that of Damascus). However, during the second stage, after the community members began to discover that they would be living in Thailand much longer than expected, it became clear that they had not saved enough to live, and ultimately the cost of living was higher than expected due to unanticipated costs of accommodation and food, and for some families, expensive Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) visits. See Table 6.1 for details the regarding the cost of rent and utilities only (I was unable to obtain a cost breakdown of food and other necessities).

Table 6.1 Families' Cost of Rent and Utilities

	Number of Persons/ household	Description	Cost of rent and utilities in THB[48] (excludes food, clothing and other necessities)
Ahmad	6	2 adults and 4 children (1 adult, 2 children in IDC)	7,000
Amer	4	2 adults and 2 children	8,000
Ziad	3	3 adults (brother of Ziad)	10,000
Hayder	5	3 adults and, 2 children (2 adults and 2 children in the IDC)	10,600*

[48] 1 GBP ≈ 50 THB or 1 USD ≈ 33 THB

Nadia	5-14**	2 parents, 5 adult children, 3 spouses, 7 grandchildren	12,000
Ibrahim	1	sleeps in Nadia's sitting room	2,500
Nasir	4	2 adults and 2 children (1 adult and 2 children in the IDC)	21,000***
Mohammed	6	2 adults and 4 children (1 adult in the IDC)	6,000

Source: Interviews with families
*Includes biweekly visits to the IDC
**Nadia's household size changed regularly, her sons moved in and out with their families during the course of my time there.
***Includes daily visits to the IDC

Most of the high cost of living was caused by the high cost of accommodation. High housing costs could be attributed to the fact that when most families arrived they chose to live in places they thought they could afford, based on two factors, their savings plans and expectations. Savings plans were calculated by factoring in a three to six month stay in Bangkok and expectations were high based on their middle class background. Essentially families were used to a certain standard of living and rented low to mid-range, furnished accommodation. These were not luxury apartments, but they were clean and basic and families felt that they needed to be furnished as was cost effective for a short stay.

Once families discovered that they would be in Bangkok longer than expected, they were not able to move to seek lower accommodation costs. First, families had paid deposits, and could not move for six months due to this. Second, as refugees generally lack legal recourse, they reported that landlords threatened to withhold deposits from families if/when they did try to move out. Third, when their visas had expired and community members sought new accommodation, they reported that they were charged extortionate rates. Over time, most wanted to move into lower cost accommodation but could not and felt trapped.

Food costs are another major consideration for Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok. The community was very proud of their traditional food and the associated recipes, including ingredients and traditional methods of cooking. Even though eating street food is the least expensive way to survive in Bangkok, as a full meal can cost as little as 20 or 30 THB (roughly $.75 to $1), the vast majority of community members refused to eat Thai food, especially street food. They found this food to be low quality and often referred to as disgusting, dirty, and unhealthy. Therefore, families spent a substantial amount of their money on ingredients and the appropriate equipment to use in the kitchen. This also included the associated cost of gas.

An additional cost was accrued when family members were sent to the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) which is located in Sathorn, a business district in Bangkok. It is expensive to visit

due to transport costs in the city. It is time consuming, as well as expensive to cook, package, and deliver food to relatives. Each visit, for example, would usually cost Hayder and Nasir anywhere from 700 to 1,000 THB as they had to take a taxi from the outskirts of town.

Considering associated costs, earning a liveable wage is extremely difficult for refugees in Bangkok. The Thai minimum wage is 300 THB per day or roughly 6,000 THB per month. While it is legally mandated, informal sector jobs do not necessarily comply and the pay can be much lower. Table 6.4 above shows the cost of rent and utilities for the families that I worked most closely with. What can be seen from this simple table is that if one member of the family was employed in a full-time minimum wage job it would not be enough to pay the rent and utilities, apart from Mohammed who lived in a studio apartment with one bed and one bathroom for six people and Ibrahim who slept on the sitting room floor of his aunt's apartment.

6.3.2. Strategies: Hitting the streets of Bangkok in search of work

During this stage, the community began to understand the complex situation in which they found themselves, and nearly all of the adult male members of the Palestinian-Syrian community began to look for work. As discussed in Chapter 4, men are the main breadwinners in Palestinian-Syrian cultures, and for this reason the men began looking for work. Mohammed, Ziad, most of Nadia's five male children, and Amer, for example all began looking for work. Hayder and Ibrahim, who arrived much later, were already aware of the long stay that was ahead of them and they began to seek work immediately upon arrival.

The community was confident that the men would find work. First, the vast majority of Palestinian-Syrians were well educated. Some had master's degrees and the vast majority had bachelor's degrees. Of those who did not, almost all had been formally certified to work in a trade, some of whom were barbers, mechanics, and tailors. Second, the younger men spoke English anywhere from an intermediate level to an advanced level (although older generations did not speak English as well). As a consequence, they were certain they would find something suitable.

With very few contacts and a lack of knowledge of the city, they began their search by walking up and down the streets of Nana, an area which contains the 'Arabic' district of Bangkok, looking for work. The Nana area is also a notorious red light district and contains the Nana Entertainment Plaza, which is three story complex made up of sex industry bars and clubs, labelled the 'largest sex complex in the world.[49]' They spent long afternoons asking for work in restaurants, dropping

[49] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nana_Plaza

off their CVs at businesses, and seeking work as translators at hospitals in the area. Those with advanced English language skills visited nearby schools, enquiring about work teaching English.

6.3.3. Challenges and Failures

Searching for work in this way resulted in very few opportunities and the strategies were considered failures. When men did find work, for the most part, the opportunities were considered impractical, something they did not feel that they could do in good conscience, or they were treated poorly and paid little for the work that was expected.

After searching for work for nearly a month, mostly walking up and down the streets of Nana, Ziad finally found a job handing out flyers for a restaurant to those passing by. However, he found this job to be impractical in economic terms. It was not even worth it to Ziad to work the entire first shift and he left. He had faith that they would find something else and felt that he was making a good decision.

> First of all, jobs are not available for just anyone. You have to beg people to give you a job, and then you end up working 12 to 13 hours a day for 300 THB per day. You work from 12 until 12 am, 12 hours distributing papers for a restaurant. This is the restaurant, this is an advertisement (he demonstrates proximity with his hands). You sit in front of the restaurant and distribute papers. This is for 9,000 baht per month; I tried it for one hour. During this hour some Arabic people told me that you cannot find busses after 12 am. So you have to take a taxi. I calculated and it will cost me, if I want to return home using a taxi, 4,000 or 5,000 a month. Also in Nana there is no taxi with meter, so [the drivers] tell you 200 or 250 to Suan Luang. I will get nothing, only 4 or 3 thousand per month or I have to move to Nana which is very expensive for us. A very bad apartment will be 9 or 10 thousand.
>
> - Ziad

For some members of the community, working in Nana is something they said they would never do, this is especially true for married men with children. Jobs in Nana were considered disreputable; jobs were often described as ‘bad’, demoralising and immoral. Most of these jobs were basic, handing out flyers, working as servers in restaurants, working in kitchens, or working as bouncers in clubs. Jobs were thought to be dangerous as owners and managers of businesses know the legal situation of refugees and can threaten to call the authorities. The rumours in the community were that managers and bosses would hold their immigration status over their heads to force them to work long hours or to be involved in illicit businesses, such as drugs or being involved in the sex industry. Also, without proper legal recourse, refugees reported being insulted and verbally mistreated on the job site.

Ahmad, Amer and Mohammed, all men in their 40s, informed me that they would not go to Nana at all to find work. Amer called Nana ‘dirty’, and Mohammed said,

> I don't like those kinds of jobs. We know what is happening in Nana, and you know what people are doing there. I really hate this system. The jobs are working in restaurants, handing out flyers, but people need a living so some have to work here. But for me, I cannot. I am not a young man, I am 48, it is not easy for me and I don't like it. I hate this.
> - Mohammed

Overall, these men said they would rather not work than to lose dignity in the eyes of others and their own sense of dignity.

According to Ibrahim, some community members did take work in Nana, and they were mostly young and single men and very few of them lasted long. Most were slightly stigmatised by the community. First, community members would whisper to me as we passed the young men that worked in Nana, "they work in Nana, we don't blame them, they have no choice," and other similar statements. Second, they report that they were not treated well by the owners and managers of the nightclubs and restaurants. Third, they felt demoralised while working and just stop eventually. According to Ibrahim, they quit "to maintain their dignity."

Nadia told the situation of her sons below when they first started looking for work in Bangkok:

> They were working for a while but they all quit. Faruk was working and he quit, and Anas quit, he had a very low salary. Once Darrak and Barrak worked at a restaurant and the owner of the restaurant gave them the attic to sleep in and it was full of rats and cockroaches so they could not sleep. The salary was low and the owner would treat them badly and say bad words to them. They also quit.
> - Nadia

Ultimately, without community contacts 'traditional' methods of seeking paid employment were not fruitful. The jobs that were found were reported as being beneath their dignity and did not pay well enough to survive. For many, they were able to avoid or walk away from such jobs by having faith that they would survive and find other livelihood options. Ziad expressed this, as shown above, and Mohammed as well:

> The work here [in Nana] is bad, I don't go here. I believe I will continue life without having to take work here. I believe, Allah, our God will help me because I am a good person. I have been here 1.5 years in Bangkok, I have not accepted this work…
> - Mohammed

What can be seen from the above is that in order to meet material needs, men engaged in finding paid, full time employment, but often searched in vain. Not only were jobs difficult to find, decisions were made with logic and values in mind, which kept them from taking just any job available. Individuals would not take jobs that caused them stress and to be overworked for insufficient income to survive. If they held strong beliefs about working or spending time in Nana, they would not even look for work in these areas. It was important for members of the

Palestinian-Syrian refugee community to maintain dignity in the eyes of their families, the community, and themselves. Although families were running out of money, they still maintained a level of hope and faith. At the same time, community members were frustrated and anxious, and they began to search for alternative means in which sustain a livelihood.

6.4. Stage 3: Seeking and Accepting Help: Informal Service Providers and Building the Community Organisation

6.4.1. Adjusting Expectations – Needing help and seeking and accepting assistance

At the third stage, the community members were discouraged, but did not know where to go for help. As described in Chapter 5, the community felt that formal services were of no use and the community began to reach out to others outside of the Palestinian-Syrian community. This was something that was difficult for some men to do, as their culture and society dictate that men should be self-sufficient and strong. However, due to multiple challenges presented in the first two stages, many members of the community felt that this was a logical step. As described in section 5.5, the Palestinian-Syrian refugees formed a community based organisation with the help of the Thai-Muslim community in order to meet their needs.

6.4.2. New Strategies: Advocacy and Networking

These networks were extremely successful in helping refugees to secure material wellbeing. This was done through fundraising and donations, as well as helping community members to finds work. Through these connections individuals were more likely to obtain jobs than through acting independently- handing in CVs or walking into businesses in Nana or other areas, for example. Individuals were more likely to obtain jobs and informal work, such as tutoring Arabic and English or catering for example (as described in section 5.5).

In addition to this, the community began to help one another. For example, once a member of the community found work, they would keep an eye out for work for their neighbours, family, and friends and make enquiries on the behalf of others. Employers would even ask if there were other community members who needed work when positions would open. An example of this is as follows: a local Muslim school was looking for a female Arabic/English teacher. The head of the school, a connection that was established through the community organisation, reached out to the community organisation to inform them of the job opportunity. Four women from two separate sub-communities went to the school to apply; they hired Reema for the position. When they needed a male teacher, Reema told Ziad about the position, he applied and was hired. Reema was then informed by a co-worker that another local Muslim school was looking for a female teacher and she helped Ayda (Nadia’s daughter-in-law) to get the position by

accompanying her to fill out the application and speak to the head of the school. According to Ziad and Reema the connections they made through the organisation helped many people in the community find jobs.

Again, as described in Chapter 5, this timeframe had an extremely positive impact on the wellbeing of the community as a whole and individual members. During this time period, from April or early May until November 2013, the entire Palestinian-Syrian community in Bangkok was well united and organised, and families met their basic needs. Due to this sense of security, and a renewed sense of autonomy and purpose, there was a strong sense of camaraderie and trust among them. According to Ibrahim, this was a great time for the community, where they spent time "hanging out together, sitting at night… Just talking, gossiping, sharing some things."

Members of the community reported that during this time they felt empowered, as if they had control over their lives. Working as a team to place pressure on UNHCR, finding and using resources, and working provided a sense of dignity. It became a way for refugees to empower themselves. Even while they were seeking assistance and receiving donations, they felt that they were earning donations through their advocacy campaigns and that they were not just hand-outs. The community organisation provided not only livelihoods in the sense of jobs and donations, it also provided a sense of dignity, accomplishment, hope, and community cohesion to the Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok. Unfortunately, the strategies utilised in this stage were met with a number of challenges and failures that led to the demise of the community organisation. The aspects that led to this are detailed and analysed below.

6.4.3. Challenges: Shifting Household Dynamics, a Lack of Transparency, and a Lack of Trust

During this third stage, the use of the community organisation and informal networks had proven beneficial for refugee families to achieve basic material wellbeing. Whether they were able to find work, meet benefactors, or simply receive donations from the Thai-Muslim community, livelihoods issues were either solved or severely mitigated when the community organisation was functioning well. Families were also able to make gains in the achievement of wellbeing in other domains, such as health, education, and security. However, it did not take long for problems to begin to emerge, such as issues within households and issues of transparency and accountability within the community organisation.

Work and Household Dynamics

The strong links between social networks and employment have been broadly researched and acknowledged (Bloch and McKay, 2015; Castilla, 2013; Obukhova 2012; Obukhova and Lan,

2013; Yakubovich, 2005), and for the Palestinian-Syrian community the case was no different. Due to the social networks which were described above, many members of the community began to find both formal and informal work. The community members worked as teachers, translators, tutors, mechanics, restaurant employees, cooks, and seamstresses. While the established social networks were useful in helping the refugee community find work and useful in the achievement of material wellbeing, the jobs available to the community caused tension and issues within many households and had implications for overall wellbeing for members of the household.

One major problem was the general mismatch between work available and skillsets, where community members were offered work in areas that they were unfamiliar or were disliked. As discussed previously, the families that came to Bangkok from Syria were middle class, educated, and had well respected and well remunerated jobs and businesses in Syria. For example, some community members were successful merchants, dentists, business owners, lawyers, engineers, and bankers. Many took great pride in their skill sets and backgrounds. As a result, some individuals, mostly men older than 40, chose not to work in fields outside their expertise, because they saw it as beneath them. Mohammed for example was unable to find work as an engineer and reported that there were no jobs out there for him as an engineer so he could not work.

Those who took work outside of their field often found work demoralising or stressful. Ayda, for example, worked as an office manager in Syria, but in Bangkok she could only find work teaching Arabic and English. This was true for Reema who worked as an engineer for the government, a respected and well paid position. Ziad also worked as a primary school teacher in Bangkok, but in Syria worked as a translator at a telecommunications company. He liked his job in Syria and was in the process of finishing his master's in business. Ayda, Reema, and Ziad greatly disliked their jobs, and working with children, something they had never done and never had interest in doing. They all worked long hours and commuted long distances each day. They felt grateful that they had full-time employment and did not struggle financially to survive, but they disliked their work immensely and were often exhausted.

Another issue was that of age. All of the individuals who were able to obtain full time employment were under the age of 35. A number of factors contributed to this. First, being young, individuals were flexible in regard to working outside of their field of interest or training. Second, much of the work available was manual labour and younger men were usually sought for this type of work. Third, younger generations in Syria are more likely to speak English, which

became a useful skill in Thailand, as many Thais speak English as a second language over Arabic. This meant that the older men in the community, who had been the breadwinners of their families for years, who had established an identity based on this, were unable to find work.

Changing gender dynamics in the household were also an issue. Women in the community found work or were offered opportunities more easily and more often than men. Women were often offered work teaching or cooking. Reema, Ayda, Fatima, and Rana, as well as many other female community members more easily found both formal and informal employment as opposed to their husbands. Even Fatima and Rana, who only had basic English skills, found work teaching and cooking. Men, on the other hand, had to search much harder and for more hours to find work.

While women could more easily access and engage in income generating activities, they would often decline work. One reason for this is that their burdens at home would not necessarily be reduced. Even if men were not working, the majority would not contribute to housework, and some women took on the same workload and chores as they were expected to in Syria, alongside their paid work outside of the house. In many ways the workload was more significant in Thailand as compared to Syria. For example, women worked hard in households trying to cook Arabic food with makeshift equipment, as kitchens in Thailand are not equipped for cooking traditional Arabic food. In addition, most families could not afford the equipment that allows for simplifying the work. Families then had to bake their own bread, rolling out dough on the floor, cooking in convection ovens or gas ovens on the ground. Women were regularly donned with burns on their forearms and hands from working on substandard equipment not designed for the preparation of their traditional cuisine. Women complained of backaches and other pains from constantly preparing food on the floor.

In Nadia's home, for example, Ayda was the oldest daughter-in-law and was burdened with the heaviest amount of work in the household. Chores were not delegated to other household members. Ayda, for many months was the only individual in the house working full-time, and was also burdened with preparing the meals, cleaning, and making the bread to sell with very little assistance from other family members. After many months Ayda finally quit her job after she miscarried a baby, but told the family and the community that she had been made redundant. According to Reema, the school called her, as she had found the job for Ayda in the first place, and asked if another community member could take Ayda's position. According to Reema the school informed her that Ayda quit to take care of her family and the school asked if they could find an unmarried community member to replace her.

This shift of employability had an impact on the family, community dynamics, and individual wellbeing. Many men, who were established in their careers and were used to financially supporting their families, were unable to find work and felt devalued as younger community members and women were able to support their families and themselves. Those who did not work had too much time on their hands and filled that time with rumination and worry. Having nothing to do each day was unbearable for many, waiting for the minutes of each day to pass while their minds begin to fill with thoughts of their families in Syria and the resources they lacked, all while attempting to make sense of the situation they were in. This had severe psychological repercussions, especially for many middle-aged men in the community. According to Ibrahim, it is in this free time that individuals created problems with one another and created blame for their current situation.

Lack of Transparency

The community organisation was at the core of creating social networks and they did so effectively. However, the organisation was represented by a small group, where eight male community members and two prominent members of the Bangkok Thai-Muslim community represented the larger Palestinian-Syrian community. Social networks and group cohesiveness, can be extremely useful in meeting material needs, but its effective functioning depends to a great extent on trust (Groenewald, 2013; Lyons and Snoxell, 2005; Phadungkiati and Connell, 2014). This level of trust was difficult for the community organisation to establish, especially since the ten members representing the community did not trust one another.

Mostly due to a lack of transparency, the organisation struggled to build trust amongst community members; they had no mechanism in place to prove their practices were ethical and not corrupt. First, the organisation had no written records. Therefore, it could not prove if jobs were offered through nepotism or favouritism or if donations were distributed fairly. Second, there was no oversight to ensure equitable distribution, and even a mistake could have bred mistrust. It also meant that distribution of donations, according to rumour, was left to the discretion of one of the eight members. Third, there was no way of knowing if donations were being kept by any of the eight core members for personal use. Fourth, there were no complaint mechanisms, so that if a member of the community felt that they were receiving an unfair portion of the distribution, there was no one with whom they could take up their grievance.

This lack of trust was coupled with two other major factors. First, as noted in Chapter 2, the traumatic experiences that refugees faced, can also have caused them to be susceptible to suspicion and paranoia. Second, as stated above, community members reported that they had

too much time on their hands, and were left with very little to do, but think. These factors made the development of trust very difficult in this informal environment.

According to Ziad the earliest problems that led to the disbandment of the community organisation can be traced back to the month after Ramadan. Although the community was still close at that time, the donations had slowed. From the above information, this follows logically. As donations slowed and with a lack of transparency, information gaps were created: where was the money and why had it stopped? To fill in these gaps, community members, who spent much of their day sitting and thinking, began to build their own understandings, 'creating reality' in the form of rumours to explain the situation in which they found themselves. These rumours spread rapidly leading to the erosion of community cohesion, until the community organisation eventually broke down and disbanded.

6.4.4. Failures: The Disbandment of the Community Organisation

The conclusion of this third stage was marked by the disbandment of the community organisation. The breakdown of the community organisation took place in November 2013, when eight community members from the Ramkanheang building were arrested. The arrests were inexplicable to the community, no one knew why the immigration police came to the condo and arrested the community members. The inexplicable nature of this event bred increased distrust and caused a surge in rumours. The rumours bred even more distrust and the community as a whole turned on one another.

By December 2013, the community organisation had ceased to exist. The story as to how this occurred varies by individual. However, what is clear is that the community lacked a shared understanding of what was happening and began to distrust each other and began to divide. Their stories demonstrate the complete lack of trust and blame placed on others.

Story #1 Mohammed

According to Mohammed, the group did not function well together and had diverging priorities.

> There was a system in place, but no one followed it. The system was that members of the group could not do anything unless they had approval from the other members…This became a problem between me and Faruk. Faruk every time, he would go and would not ask… Faruk did what he wanted without asking while others did nothing. That is when the problems started, we were having a hard time.
>
> We did not have an understanding, we came from two different directions. He asked everyone for money, and for me, it was important to put pressure on the UN. This is the most important thing, more than money.

> Then the immigration caught me and the group stopped.

Story #2 Ahmad

According to Ahmad, after a short time, the group became untrustworthy.

> Every one of them tried to bring aid and donations to his own group [family and friends] and not everyone in the community. Before we were one group, but then after a while everyone was just looking for their own [family and friends] and after that they cancelled the organisation. I quit at that time.
>
> Many people gave us aid, 40,000 or 70,000 THB for our community. Then we would ask [each other], "where is the money?" because the money was not divided, the money just vanished, no one knows where it went. One of the group members was once given 10,000 USD and the money just disappeared, it was not divided to the others.
>
> So we started to hurt each other, to harm each other, and we became weaker. There is some hate between us, sometimes people start to hate another one, literally hate… People just started to spend their money and no one would help another one for any reason.
>
> The people in the organisation were only trying to take advantage and used the organisation for their own benefit. Tarek found out and said, "ok, let's stop". This was December 2013.

Story #3 Faruk

According to Faruk, he was working hard to help everyone in the community and was trying to be a leader. People then started stealing from others and taking advantage of him. They started blaming him for their problems and saying Faruk is the one lying and stealing, when, according to him, it is other community members.

> I was trying to do good for everyone, and everyone says I am a thief and a liar. I am done helping others, I am tired of the problems it has brought me and my family. I only want to concentrate on helping [my family].

Story #4 Amer

According to Amer, the entire community organisation was corrupt and stealing, and the level of trust depleted. He said that the community knew about the thefts because donors would post on Facebook that they had contributed, but no one in the community would see the benefits.

> It started when people started to look for their own benefits. Each one started to steal money and keep the money for himself, you know. The agent who represents each group would be given money to divide among the group but he just keeps the money for himself. They would say, "I lost it" and it was 80,000 THB. And all of them, not just Faruk, all of them.
>
> The agents did not divide the shares fairly, they did not divide anything fairly.

> There was a page on Facebook that talks about what happened, so you would know people would donate, and we would find out and the donors would find out. The page is about the news of the community in Thailand. It talks about everything.
>
> Then Tarek said “I quit and I don’t want to be involved in this anymore” and they split.
>
> The agents of the groups started to use their positions for their own benefits. They used it to find a good jobs for their friends and relatives and did not take care of the others and the needy people, so the people became upset and started asking “why are they doing this” so Tarek quit.

6.4.5. Negotiating Meaning and Reality

How and why the group disbanded is not known due to this wide variation of stories, but what can be seen is that the beginnings of the disbandment can be traced back to the moment in which a shift occurred from what was expected to what was actually occurring. Although short lived, rent was being paid by donations for more than a month and food was being provided. Donations were so plentiful that the community began to assume that their problems were solved, or severely alleviated. When the money stopped, no information was provided by the community organisation as to why, or their explanations were not accepted. Regardless of the reality of the situation, the community needed to understand what had happened and they began to fill in the gaps, thereby negotiating and creating reality. What it does show is that the lack of proper organisation, trust, and transparency led to the demise of the community organisation, more than anything else. Reality creation and justification is perpetuated through the rumour mill. This concept of reality creation and rumour spreading is a major part of Stage 4 where it is explored in depth, but begins at this stage and is exacerbated by increased insecurity.

The immigration raid was the final straw for the community organisation. The raid was, of course, inexplicable, and no one understood why immigration targeted this one building. The questions began: Did Ahmad call immigration so his wife could be arrested so they could travel faster? Did Nasir’s sons cause trouble in the community making the management call the police? Did the community retaliate against Ahmad and Mohammed from allegedly stealing money from the community organisation? No one knew, but everyone wanted to know and they began to fill in the blanks with rumours, triggering and fuelling a blame game that further contributed to the dysfunction and disunity of the community. This analysis demonstrates that for this refugee community to be well, it needed to be able to trust each other and rely on each other. Using the community organisation to achieve wellbeing at first had remarkable outcomes, but ultimately failed due to a lack of trust and reliability.

> Yes, it was much better before, hanging out together, sitting at night. Just talking, gossiping, sharing some things. It was better, now each one is in their home, they do not go out, they do not visit each other as before. It just happened, I am not sure how.
>
> Maybe the community here fell apart because of us, because of our feelings. Because of our spontaneous actions. Like, maybe being greedy, being childish about everything, or wanting everything for you; that is what happened. No one was honest.
>
> Everything is harder now than how it was. It is hard not making trouble with anyone. Even if there is a fight, you should not take a side. Maybe the people, they are not working, they have nothing to do, just talking, making arguments, making fights, nothing to do.
> - Ibrahim

6.5. Stage 4: Division and Isolation- Other types of support

6.5.1. Adjusting Expectations

This fourth stage encompasses the two major consequences marked by the disbandment of the community organisation. The first consequence is that, due to the dissolution of any sense of community cohesion, people lost their built-in social support system, which was an extremely important aspect of their coping strategy. As a result of heightened insecurity and levels of distrust, the community began to cope through engaging in strategies that exacerbated these already existing negative outcomes. Mostly the community began to mitigate uncertainty and justify their own actions by 'creating reality' and negotiating meaning through the spreading of rumours and also by isolating themselves. These actions had significant implications on psychological and relational wellbeing. Second, the rifts in the community that were created resulted in limited options for achieving material wellbeing, resulting in families having to make costlier trade-offs, utilising strategies that led to wellbeing failures.

The networks that they built to achieve material and psychological wellbeing disintegrated and due to alleged corrupt practices, donors began to abandon the community, and community members began to isolate themselves from one another. Those without steady jobs, which was a majority of the population, had to find other avenues in which to earn an income. However, not only could they not rely on one another, they did not want others knowing their livelihood strategies, and the community became more secretive, started blaming others when problems arose, created enemies, and increased rumours of violence in the community began to spread. People reported events of extremely violent physical altercations between community members, death threats, domestic violence, and child abuse. Community members began to fear one another and began to isolate themselves, only trusting a small group of people. As a

result, their lives grew more difficult as the community was more than disjointed, the mental health of many community members began to deteriorate rapidly.

> When I arrived they were well organised, but now they are very disorganised and every family is taking care of themselves. Now everyone is fighting everyone. I don't know what you will write for your PhD, we all have the same story. People do terrible things to each other and there is nothing they can do because they threaten to call immigration on each other. Many people lie and make problems for one another. The community fell apart because it became all about money, everyone was on their own.
> - Ziad

6.5.2. Strategies and Coping

Creating meaning through rumours and the further breakdown of community cohesion

Box 6.1 Understanding 'Reality'

I met Mohammed for lunch on one of his last days in Bangkok in May 2014, to say goodbye. We met in Nana for tea and after we finished we both took the canal boat through the city toward our respective homes. As we approached my stop we began to say our final goodbyes. Mohammed shook my hand tightly as the boat approached my stop and said,

> Michaelle, be careful with our community. Everyone in our community lies, everyone, even us. People will try to steal from you. Do not trust anyone.

I thanked him for his advice and we shook hands again, wishing each other well, promising to keep in touch, and see one another again. As the boat pulled away from the pier and we waved until we were out of sight, I turned toward my home and thought to myself, "He did not exclude himself. If there is no truth, what am I even doing here?"

Constructing meaning and reality through rumour creation was the most common and universal coping mechanism within the community to deal with a lack of knowledge, control, and understanding and rumours were often rooted in fear and distrust. Conflicting rumours were told and spread on a regular basis by almost all members of the community. Rumours were spread about Thai laws and immigration policies, UNHCR and service providers, and other community members. Within the Palestinian-Syrian community, rumours served various purposes: to mitigate expectations, to make sense of the UNHCR procedure and the associated anxieties, to make sense of hardships, explain behaviours of others, to build alliances – often turning others into the enemy, enhance relationships, gain power, and justify actions. For many, these stories became reality, whether contrived or fact, they were true to the creator. Through these stories, they created a sense of identity for themselves and among others.

A particularly important role of the rumour was to create 'the other' in the community. This creation of 'the other' allowed for community members to compartmentalise reality, making

the situation 'black and white' and 'good and bad.' If others were bad, then their motivations and decisions were good, as the world could then be seen in binary. To create this binary existence, community members often developed at least one arch-nemesis, creating almost a comic book villain of other members of the Palestinian-Syrian community. Table 6.2 demonstrates these rivalries and their main concern with the person in question.

Table 6.2 Enemy Creation

Person	Rival	Story (as told by community members)
Amer Hayder Ziad	Faruk	Faruk and his brothers were stealing, not only from the community organisation, but extorting money from community members through fraud, coercion, and violence. Faruk threatened to kill community members and beat Amer with a lead pipe, causing permanent damage to the function of his arm. Faruk and his father stole 6,700 USD from Hayder.
Ahmad	Mohammed	Mohammed stole a substantial amount of money from the organisation, and did not share with the seven other members.
Nasir	Ahmad Faruk	Ahmad and Faruk were part of a mafia and control the Palestinian-Syrian community, stealing money from those most in need, and taking part in elaborate cons.
Faruk	Ziad Ahmad Hader	Ziad and Ahmad are liars and stole from everyone, including his family. Hayder stole 3,300 from Faruk.

During each visit I would hear new stories as to why and how these 'enemies' had harmed them and made their lives unbearable. None of these stories could be substantiated and were often directly conflicting, but their importance grew over time. This was often the case with men who lacked work and had isolated themselves. They had 'figured out' what had happened and explained to me how they had reasoned the event. Nasir for example developed a theory as to why the immigration raid on the Ramkanhaeng building in Novemenber 2013 took place:

> Faruk and Ahmad are in a mafia. They control everything and steal from everyone. The reason immigration came to the condo was because Faruk and Ahmad called them to arrest Ahmad's wife. They thought that UNHCR will rush their file. They had to make sure that it looked like a normal raid so they took my family too. They are bad men.
> – Nasir

The creation of the 'other' could be heard in daily conversations and in the words used to describe the situation. Amer would describe his sister and her sons as 'bad' and often suspected his nephew Ibrahim of 'learning their ways.' According to Amer, Ibrahim was becoming 'the other,' becoming like Faruk and Nadia, who he saw as the enemy. "Ibrahim is becoming one of

them. He is learning their ways. He tells them everything about us; he is their spy. We can't trust him anymore." This type of thinking worked to further isolate the community as distinct sides were being drawn.

According to Ibrahim the purpose of rumours was to put people against one another and create artificial alliances. In the condo where he lived, rumours created "two groups living together in the same place."

> People here, they do not accept when you disagree, especially at my aunt's house; if there is anyone who is not with them, they are against them. If you don't say the other side is wrong, they will say "you are with him, go with him".
> - Ibrahim

Hayder described the entire Palestinian-Syrian community as 'bad,' 'evil,' and 'crazy.' Mohammed would often discuss people and compartmentalise them by their actions, labelling others as good or bad. He believed the world could be seen in black or white, "I hate grey, there is no grey," he would say.

This sort of disaggregation or categorisation of good or bad, with or against, contributed not only to distinguish alliances in the community but has also led to the self-selected isolation of those who adhere to this belief. Hayder, Nasir, Amer, and Mohammed all became extremely cut off from any and all members of the community, because they saw all or some of the members of the community as 'bad' and felt that separation was the only way to stay safe. Amer only interacted with people who came to visit him in his room and only left his room to go to the super market, the mosque, and to visit his mother's grave on Fridays. Hayder and Nasir spoke to no other members of the community unless they were visiting family at that IDC. Hayder even lived in hiding, no other member of the community knew his whereabouts. According to Hayder, Faruk and his brothers threatened to kill him, and he was afraid to let anyone know where he lived.

Nasir confided that he felt that life was very hard and the entire Palestinian community is self-interested and there is no trust.

> They think everyone has ulterior motives, "why is she talking to me, what does she want from me" and no one trusts anyone. People wear masks. They say nice things to you then walk away and say bad things. They (Palestinian community) is filled with bad people. I have no friends. People closed their hearts here.
> - Nasir

Livelihood strategies in times of isolation and desperation

Throughout the above stages, the community members had to adapt and make trade-offs adjusting their wellbeing strategies. However, it was by the time the fourth stage began, when the shocks that the community faced were so frequent and overwhelming that wellbeing homeostasis became impossible. By this time, as a result of a lack of trust and isolation, livelihood strategies became independent undertakings and the options that people were left with were well below what was seen as necessary to live a dignified life.

While I tried to develop a holistic picture of the strategies employed, I found that what was actually the most important aspect was not exactly what people did, but how they felt about the ways in which they sought material wellbeing, what information was withheld and what was told, and how refugees justified, to themselves and others, their situation. Below is a list of strategies employed in order to meet material wellbeing.

1. Remittances

Many families received remittances from abroad. The vast majority of families I encountered had at least one family member living outside of Syria and every participant family had at least one member in the Gulf, Europe, North America or Australia. Most families received remittances at one point or another. Hayder and his sister, for example, received money from their brother who worked as a painter in Qatar. Amer received assistance from one of his two sisters who lived in Australia. Nadia also received remittances, although never admitted to this. However, according to Amer and Ibrahim, after breaking ties with Amer, the sisters, in the words of Ibrahim, chose a side, and stopped giving Nadia money. The sisters also did not approve of how Nadia spent the money they sent and discontinued support.

Ziad and Reema, Ahmad, and Ibrahim did not report that they received remittances, but others in the community believed that they did. If they did indeed receive support, they omitted this information. Again, receiving support, even from family members, is seen as beneath the dignity of many male heads of households and their wives within this community, and many would not admit to this even if it did occur. Those who did admit that they received remittances, often did so in a low voice with their heads held down when discussing this topic.

2. Loans

When individuals or families did not have family members abroad who could afford to send money they were sometimes forced to take out loans. Nasir, for example used to own a tourism company in Syria, but had not worked in three years and ran out of money. To cover the cost of

living for him and his family in the IDC, he borrowed money from a friend in Germany. Nasir told me one day that "this man wants his money back, but I have no idea how I will repay him," causing him much stress.

Mohammed and Fatima took a loan from a former colleague of Mohammed's in Dubai. When they told me about the money, they wanted to assure me, on multiple occasions, that it was not charity. They said it was a loan and that they would repay it, displaying their unwillingness to accept charity.

3. Selling assets

Most of the families lost everything in Syria: houses, businesses, cars, etc. Nasir, for example lost a tourism business and Nadia and Amer both lost farms. However, a few were lucky to retain assets that they were able to sell.

Hayder, for example, had bought a house in Syria and was making payments. According to Hayder, in order to buy a house, a down payment must be made and individuals pay instalments. The individual will receive a deed but can only physically obtain the house after a certain amount is paid. Since Hayder had not yet paid enough to acquire the house, he was able to sell the deed to the house for a small amount of money.

Ahmad also had a ceramics shop in a historical market in Damascus. When his family was arrested he needed money and had to sell one of his shops. According to Ahmad, it was worth 120,000 USD before the war and he sold it for 11,000 USD, less than 10 per cent of its value.

4. Donations

After working, remittances, loans and selling assets, when families could not make ends meet, they turned to donations as a final resort. According to Nadia, her family relied a lot on donations to survive. As is seen from Box 6.2, seeking donations was an important strategy for her family. According to her, the salaries of her children were not sufficient. The Malaysian embassy, for example, regularly donated food and once donated a refrigerator. Even after regular donations had stopped in the community, some members of the Thai-Muslim community, including Ayda's former boss, were still providing regular food donations to particular families.

Ahmad and Abeer reported that they did not receive any donations, however, many brought food and toys to Abeer when she was in the IDC, and individuals such as Kanta, the active member of the Thai-Muslim community, brought food to the family and let them stay on her farm outside of Bangkok, where she took care of them. Tarek also donated the money for bail.

Mohammed and Fatima lived almost completely off of donations when the community organisation was first formed. Afterward, Mohammed received some food donations in the IDC, as did Fatima outside of the IDC. Ziad accepted donations when he and his wife were low on money. After they both started working they no longer sought donations, according to them it was important to him to not accept charity.

When the community organisation existed it seemed that they were able to justify donations through the notion of 'Palestinian solidarity through suffering,' as was described in Chapter 4. During that stage, the community worked together to promote their cause and did not feel as if they were begging, but uniting for the greater good. It is not until the community organisation disbanded that receiving donations became something that is seen as degrading and negative.

5. Getting arrested intentionally

The UNHCR, often by request of embassies and insistence of NGOs, will place priority on files when family members are in the IDC. For example, if a family of five is living in Bangkok, and one member of the family is arrested, they will move the file to the front of the line for refugee status determination (RSD) and third country resettlement. Therefore, when individuals become frustrated they talk about getting arrested intentionally, and rumours circulate that some do in fact turn themselves into immigration.

Nasir, whose wife and two children were in the IDC, reported that he would receive phone calls from other refugees asking him about the best way to get arrested and how long he thought they might get detained. Ahmad was told by others that he was lucky that his wife was arrested, so they could travel sooner. Ibrahim tried to help a community member bail out of the IDC and he told Ibrahim not to bother because he thought the UN would not rush his family's file if he went out; "I am just wasting my time here, inside or out. I might as well stay inside here," he said to Ibrahim.

6. Deceit v. begging as a livelihoods strategy

For this particular group, receiving donations or begging for money is seen as shameful and socially unacceptable. When asked what he would do if he ran out of money, Ahmad said, "I might do worse things than others [have done], but I would never ask people for money. I was a rich man in Syria; I would be ashamed of myself." Ziad explained that it is possible to go out and seek donations, and that any Mosque would help as it is a precept of Islam to give to those in need, but it would leave anyone in the community feeling 'very bad' about themselves. "It is something about dignity, I cannot ask for support like many other people here [have done], but

maybe the others are more practical than us." Reema agreed, "They have changed their mentality to survive here."

Ibrahim explained that distributing pamphlets for nightclubs in Nana was not only against their religion but culturally unacceptable due to the use of alcohol and the prevalence of sex work. However, he also stated that it is better to work in these types of jobs rather than to beg, which was, according to him, worse than working in Nana and absolutely unacceptable. This demonstrates the internal justifications and negotiations individuals make; ultimately they are saying, 'at least I am not begging.'

Confirming this assertion with Ziad and Reema, they agreed without hesitation, "Absolutely," Ziad replied, "The only kind of beggar with dignity is one with a disability. It is not respectable to beg at all. If you can work, you should work." According to them, this is why many families will put on a show of poverty and desperation to receive donations, it is a face-saving tactic that is used rather than asking for money directly (see Box 6.2).

Box 6.2 Deceit v. Begging

I said goodbye to Farruk, Nadia, and Ayda and turned to walk down the long, narrow, road toward Phattanakarn. The road is an average road in Bangkok, purely cement, scattered with litter, and patrolled by the local 'soi', or street, dogs. I found myself fighting tears over the scene I had just witnessed. The family had run out of money and was relocated from the condo to a small room in a small building down the road from the condo. The room was small, had no furniture, was stifling hot and was occupied by a number of smaller creatures, mostly mosquitoes, as it was positioned near a drainage ditch. The new room was essentially unbearable.

In my next meeting with Ziad and Reema, they informed me that the family had rented the room as a type of show room for UNHCR and the media. "They use that room so that UNHCR and others will think they are poor." I argued and said, that could not be true, and I had seen it. They dropped the topic and told me to believe whatever made me happy.

My following visits to Nadia were in the original condo in the two bedroom apartment where they had always lived, although they told me that they live in the other small, sad room down the road. Nadia was still residing in the large, two-bedroom apartment, but most of the family had moved out and only Ibrahim, Nadia, her husband and their son Barrak were left in the two bedroom apartment. I asked Ibrahim where everyone had gone and he told me they all moved into their own apartments in the building and in the condo next door. No one lived or slept in the small, sad room near the drainage ditch. I asked Ibrahim why they rented it and he told me he did not know.

I did not see the room again for months; the next time I saw the room was on a Thai TV channel, where Faruk, an overweight man, explained to the reporter that he and the family were starving. According to the interview, the whole family slept in the small, sad room and they could not even afford one meal every day. I found out soon after that Nadia's family was considered to be an

'at risk' family, by UNHCR standards and was therefore given a monthly stipend, usually reserved for single mothers and individuals with chronic health issues. UNHCR decides which families are the most vulnerable by conducting an assessment and seeing the conditions in which families live.

Essentially, box 6.2 demonstrates that Nadia's family was showing potential donors and UNHCR that they were worse off than they actually were in order to receive donations. In this sense, they were begging without begging. They had set up a situation that induced pity, rather than having to ask for money. According to Ibrahim, Ziad and Reema, Mohammed and Fatima, Ahmad and Abeer, many community members attempted to raise money through practices such as these.

According to Ibrahim, this behaviour was a direct consequence of UNHCR's treatment of the community. The UNHCR treated the community as if they are poor and could not take care of themselves, and then people in the community began to act poor, "I don't know why, maybe for more donations, more aid. It is bad, I don't like this. They are lying sometimes, you don't have to [lie]." Ibrahim's assessment of the situation seemed on point. With people unable to access what they need to be well, and constantly being treated as victims, as opposed to people with agency and choice, people started to see themselves this way. Especially when faced with so many challenges, many felt that this was the only way to sustain a livelihood.

7. Extortion

Some community members were accused of engaging in exploitative and extortive livelihood practices. Faruk, Mohammed, Hayder, Ahmad, and Nasir were all accused of deceptive practices that ranged from posing as other community members to seek donations to threatening violence to extort money from families.

Fatima and Mohammed referred to the practice of using the tragic stories of others to earn money as 'using a cover story.' Both Mohammed and Ahmad told stories of community members posting other people's stories on Facebook, and asking for money for their families. More simply stated, Person A would post on Facebook the story of Person B, telling the world about Person B's tragic encounter, and they would ask for donations. Person A would keep the money, never having consulted with Person B. For example, Ahmad and Abeer had two children living in the IDC for eight to nine months, the children were aged 2 and 6 when arrested. According to Ahmad, he would find pictures of his children on Facebook and see individuals asking for donations to help his children, but Ahmad and Abeer did not know these people asking for funds or receive this money. They showed me two different Facebook pages where this had happened, and I had come across one independently.

> When my wife and family were in prison, many people would ask for aid in my name. I did not receive anything, but after a while, one of the men who gave us aid called and asked if I received the money, and I said no. We found out the person he sent the money to just kept the money for himself… One time two men came to me and told us that they could earn a lot of money by getting donations based on our current situation, they said 'we can bring donations for you, but we will share it 50/50.'
> - Ahmad

Community members told many stories of Faruk extorting money from others as well. Reema recounted a story of how Faruk stole 27,000 THB from a local private school which was meant to subsidise the cost of the informal school in the building they lived in. Reema also told of how on multiple occasions teachers from her school would come by the building to give donations. Later they would tell Reema how much money they gave and Reema would find out that no one in the building had ever seen this money. They recounted stories of how Faruk had stolen from Mr. Kijja and Rhamati. According to Mr. Kijja, Faruk asked to borrow over 48,000 THB and when Mr. Kijja went to collect it, Faruk called him crazy and denied ever borrowing the money. "They must think I am so stupid," Mr. Kijja told me.

Overall, at this stage, refugees engaged in strategies that they were not proud of, living in a way in which they were not accustomed. Do to this many tried to justify their choices or tried to hide them. Some blamed other community members, stole from other community members, or potentially elaborated stories to justify the conditions in which they were in. What is clear is that the rifts in the community and enemy creation allowed for the poor treatment of others as they no longer respected or defended one another.

6.5.3. Stage 4: Wellbeing Outcomes

> It is hard, to wake up every day, with no one to say hello to, no one to be there for you if you have a problem, like you have to carry the world all by yourself.
> - Ibrahim

I argue that there is no 'final' wellbeing outcome, but this is the stage where I left the community, and these were the outcomes that I saw. At this stage, the community was experiencing a wide array of wellbeing failures, they were struggling to meet basic needs, many were acting in ways inconsistent with their values in order to meet needs, and many lived isolated from the community. At this stage, when I asked how families would rate their lives on a scale from one to ten, scores ranged from zero to five, with some saying that this was not life and that they were not even living, some saying that they were "waiting in hell."

> How am I? Ha, I am not even living. We are not working, we are just waiting.
> - Abu Faruk, Nadia's husband.

> We are not alive, not dead, we just have to stay here a long time, and we are not even sure until when.
> - Nadia

Living in isolation effected the strategies in which people engaged in order to sustain a livelihood. The strategies they engaged in did not allow them to achieve wellbeing. The repercussions of such isolation were such that overall subjective and relational wellbeing were not achieved. For those living in isolation, living off of loans, remittances, and the sale of assets, they felt that they were trapped, hostages of UNHCR's system.

> We don't make any decisions here. We just wait for UNHCR.
> - Amer

> There is nothing we can do but wait.
> - Mohammed

> We are just waiting.
> - Rana

> I am not in charge, I cannot make decisions, we don't have choices, we can't make decisions, we are hostages.
> - Amer

> We do not have options here to make decisions, we wait.
> - Nadia

At this stage, the community could not trust anyone. In response, individuals hid themselves. Avoiding community members turned to complete isolation, where individuals would sit and continue to negotiate reality through their thought process. This is when people experienced suffering at its worst, many living without any hope.

6.6. Positive coping strategies

Across all four stages, and most certainly in the fourth stage, individuals utilised coping mechanisms that were beneficial to their psychological wellbeing. Some tried to change the situation by changing how they thought about it. While it did not solve all of their problems or help them to achieve overall wellbeing, it did help individuals and families to navigate the hardest of times. It also showed that individuals are resourceful and resilient enough to make meaning from their loss. They focus on their bright futures, try to appreciate what they have right in front of them, and trust in their God.

> Please make note in your PhD that Reema can kill bugs now.
> - Ziad

Families and individuals focused on what they had and would gain from the experience. Reema, Abeer, and Mohammed all attested to having appreciated aspects of their experience because it has caused them to learn and grow as people. Reema and Ibrahim came from protective families and considered themselves sheltered and naïve before coming to Thailand. Through their experiences they had learned about life and their strengths, and they tried to remember this when times were hard. Abeer also felt that she was able to gain strength through her time at the IDC and after her time there felt that she could handle any experience. Mohammed said that, in some ways, Bangkok had been a wonderful experience for his family. It had been very hard, but they had learned so much. They had opportunities to learn Thai, meet people from all over the world, and have a deeper and broader understanding of the world.

> It is behind us; why do I want to think about these things? Sure I was scared, but now I am not, what is the point? – Fatima

Families talked of resettlement and moving on regularly. They talked about how things would be better when they resettled, what they might do, what they might study, how they would work, and if they would struggle to learn the new language. People tried to focus on the new opportunities when they could. Individuals also talked about looking forward to being able to take control of their lives and move on from the past.

The vast majority of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok were Muslim, and turned to their faith when they felt troubled. Many prayed in hard times, or just simply prayed every day. Most put their faith in the idea that God had a plan, and thanked God for what he had provided for their family.

> I live for my God, I pray every day and thank God for what he gives to us.
> - Amer

> This is our fate. I know this now, and I have to deal with it. This thought helps me to worry less. I thank God for what he gives.
> - Ahmad

Some tried to recognise the positive aspects of their situation, comparing themselves to others who were worse off and trying to help them. They would compare themselves to their families in Syria, or refugees who were stuck in camps or drowning in the Mediterranean. Community members also found purpose in helping others who were worse off. Ziad and Reema regularly looked for work for other community members using their networks based in the school where they worked. Hayder found purpose helping his sister in the IDC. Ibrahim regularly visited the

IDC when he had a valid visa, visiting strangers from Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Pakistan, trying to cheer them up, spending his meagre earnings on buying them food.

Abeer during her time in the IDC would regularly go out of her way to help other women in her cell. She would ask me to mail letters to their relatives, contact their respective embassies, and bring items for them, such as sanitary pads or hygiene products. Even after she was released on bail, when we were waiting for a car to take her back, Kanta found out that she could bail out Nasir's family as well but would have to fill out paper work. This would delay Abeer's trip home from seeing her husband and two children who she had not seen in roughly eight months. When Kanta asked if she could wait Abeer cooly said, "No problem, in one hour we can help someone. It has been eight months, what is one hour."

6.7. Conclusion

What this analysis demonstrates is that Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok were constantly adapting and adjusting their strategies when met with challenges along the way, causing refugees to readjust their expectations and create mental coping mechanisms in which to make sense of the situation in which they found themselves. With each trade-off and adjustment, they faced wellbeing failures, and made changes to their strategies accordingly. With every adjustment, their overall levels of wellbeing diminished. By the end of the fourth stage many had lost hope, describing their situation as hell, or not even living.

Not only were people faced with institutional obstacles to achieve material wellbeing, but they were also faced with obstructions to the achievement of relational and subjective wellbeing. For example, the legal barriers were in place which inhibited refugees from working, but other restrictions such as the lack of community coherence, further contributed to these hindrances, making the achievement of material wellbeing even more difficult. Community organisations have been highly effective in cities such as Kuala Lumpur, where UNHCR provides oversight and financial assistance. These organisations are well established and have membership fees, for example. These organisations empower refugees and show that they 'are far from the passive victims often conjured up by the media and also aid organisations' (Hoffstaedter, 2015: 197). This demonstrates that the positive aspects of the community organisation could have continued if the right support and assistance had been in place. However, when individuals are left to act with impunity and information is lacking, trust cannot be sustained, and therefore communities cannot function well.

The disbandment of the community organisation and the dissolution of community cohesion had detrimental effects on the entire community. Their ability to meet their basic needs, as well

as their psychological wellbeing, was greatly diminished. Being part of the community was important for Palestinian-Syrians, and the lack of a sense of unity resulted in struggle, isolation, and feelings of loneliness. The diminished level of wellbeing, both material and psychological, reflects an important aspect of relational wellbeing. Essentially personal wellbeing is dependent upon the wellbeing of the entire community and the lack of personal wellbeing can, in turn, create cracks in the foundation of community cohesion. Where no community cohesion exists, personal wellbeing is difficult, if not impossible to attain. This is especially true in the Palestinian-Syrian community, where individuals identified as members of this global community in diaspora. At the same time, when individuals are feeling insecure and suffering wellbeing failures, trust in the community will breakdown as a result.

This analysis also demonstrates that basic needs must be met in order for people to be well, but basic needs are not sufficient for people to be well. When little more than basic needs are met, the psychological repercussions, such as the pain people feel from being left idle for months or years on end, work to impede the acquisition of basic needs. For example, when people are left idle they create stories which cause tension in the community, cutting off social networks which were vital to livelihood generation. Therefore, this relationship among objective, subjective, and relational wellbeing can be seen.

Overall, this analysis shows that the Palestinian-Syrian community is not able to achieve wellbeing. The work of Cummins et al. (2009), as well as Diener and Biswas-Diener (2001), described in Chapter 2, helps us to understand wellbeing as a process, where we actively employ strategies in order to maintain wellbeing homeostasis. However, both point out that when we are faced with a large number of obstacles, human beings are unable to maintain wellbeing. The rapid rate in which the community faced new challenges and obstacles (whether material, psychological, or structural), left refugees unable to adapt, resulting in the inability to achieve wellbeing. Refugees in Bangkok are unable to achieve wellbeing, or maintain positive levels of wellbeing, as they are constantly struggling to be well.

Finally, this chapter is important as it sheds light onto the strategies of refugees that service providers do not understand. When service providers ask why refugees will not work, or express that refugees are lazy, and happy to come to Thailand and live off of donations[50], it shows a lack of understanding of the challenges and constraints refugees face in obtaining employment and sustaining a livelihood. It shows a compartmentalisation of material wellbeing from overall

[50] Interview with head the Care Team at the Evangelical Church of Bangkok 22/08/2013

wellbeing by the service provider. This chapter is important as it builds an understanding of wellbeing as both a process and an outcome as individuals strive to negotiate a complex system.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok. The lives of refugees, especially in urban areas, can be greatly misunderstood. Refugees in urban areas often live in hiding, spread throughout sprawling centres, and many are suspicious and even fearful of others, thus limiting their interactions. Further, those of us on the outside will often look in on their lives with biases and judgements, obscuring the picture we seek to obtain.

In order to gain an understanding I have carried out a deep exploration as to how refugees maintain wellbeing. Wellbeing is a useful framework for this particular research question because it allows us to examine the situation from a holistic vantage point, where refugees are at the centre of their own lives. It situates our perspective within their families, communities, social networks, and institutions, assessing the quality of their lives based on what they deem as necessary to be well. Through this framework, we can also understand the lives of refugees within this particular context, without compartmentalising, analysing the values and desired outcomes as a part of everyday decision-making.

This thesis applies the wellbeing framework in order to answer the research question: *How do Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok, Thailand attempt to achieve and maintain wellbeing?* I answer this question by constructing knowledge around the following themes which are presented in three chapters: *subjective* w*ellbeing and values* (Chapter 4), t*he structural and institutional* (Chapter 5)*,* and *livelihood and coping strategies* (Chapter 6).

The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions from the thesis, tying together the relevant findings and highlighting my reflections. This chapter first discusses the main findings from each chapter, examining each theme above and the contribution to the literature. Second, this chapter reflects upon how the findings from each chapter interconnect and create a holistic understanding of the situation. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications for future research.

7.1. Subjective Wellbeing and Values

This thesis begins by analysing the values that must be realised in order for Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok to live well. Findings from participant observation and interviews, supplemented by anthropological studies, revealed that this particular group placed value on the following:

1) a life that they see as dignified, where **dignity** is determined by their role in the household, determined by cultural codes, and as viewed by others;
2) to be able to practice their **religion** freely;
3) to ensure their physical **safety and security**;
4) to ensure that their **families** are safe, secure, together, and healthy;
5) to be part of a (Palestinian) **community**;
6) to have access to **freedoms and opportunities**; and
7) to have access to an **education and learning**.

After analysing the above, I was able to categorise these values into four domains: **Education**, **Health**, **Livelihoods**, and **Security and Protection**. These domains, first, represent what was needed to be well; second, represent how and what values were necessary in order to achieve wellbeing; and third, provide a way in which to examine overlapping values. Table 7.1 (taken from Chapter 4) shows the relationship between values and wellbeing. For example, education was necessary for families to be well. This is not merely for the sake of obtaining education, but because education allowed Palestinian-Syrians to realise their values. Education brought **freedoms and opportunities**, provided a personal sense of **dignity**, and let parents feel that they were taking care of their children and **families**. In this particular context, for this particular group, it also indicated freedom of movement and security. Therefore, this research shows how the realisation of values was essential for people to achieve wellbeing.

Table 7.1 Domains of Wellbeing, Values and Needed Resources

Domains of Wellbeing	**Values**	**Resource requisites**
Education	Education and learning, freedoms and opportunities, dignity, family, safety and security	Education access (enrolment), access to educational inputs (uniforms/school supplies), secure access (transport), ability to learn new and applicable skills
Security and protection	Families, religion, dignity, freedom and opportunities, community, safety and security	Legal protection/recourse, physical security (institutional), mobility, trust and feelings of security (community and family), family togetherness (proximity and connection), knowledge and information
Health (including mental health)	Families, dignity, community, safety and security	Free/inexpensive health care (for chronic/acute conditions), knowledge and information, community support

Livelihoods	Dignity, freedoms and opportunities, community, family, safety and security	The right to work, physical security (transport and in job), legal recourse, ability to apply skills/knowledge and acquire new skills/knowledge

Further, Table 7.1 shows a number of requisites that must be in place to achieve wellbeing in each domain. Taking the example of education we see that much is required. One requisite, for example, is access. This means that the context needed to allow children to go to school: schools needed to be welcoming to children, education needed to be free or affordable, children needed to be able to travel there safely without fear of being arrested, and a safe environment was required where children were able to learn. In this sense, we can see that wellbeing is context dependent, where structures and institutions presented impediments and opportunities to be well. Essentially, the Palestinian-Syrian community required the realisation of values to be well, but values could only be realised if the context allowed for the relevant opportunities.

7.1.1. Wellbeing and forced migration

Findings from this research demonstrate that values dictated what was needed to be well, and Palestinian-Syrian refugees developed and enacted strategies to attempt to realise their values. Forced migration studies tends to overlook this aspect of agency, where refugees are often considered to be forced from their homes due to conflict and violence, driven by fear. However, other factors and determinants tend to influence their choice to flee, such as personal values and capabilities. My research shows that people made informed judgements, based on their values and capabilities, about whether they could and how they would be able to flee, demonstrating agency, even in moments of crises. Families and individuals weighed consequences, made country comparisons, and assessed which route would allow them to achieve what they saw as most valuable. Research was done by refugees in the pre-flight stage in order to find the country of best fit and trade-offs were made in order to attempt to achieve the best life possible, considering the situation.

For example, six of the seven values played a role in their decision to leave Syria and both values and capabilities were reflected in their decisions to seek asylum in Bangkok, as opposed to seeking refuge in camps on the border or by crossing into Europe[51]. Values, such as maintaining

[51] I did not identify religion as a driver of migration. Participants tended to see Islam and Christianity as mobile, a way of life they could take with them and practice freely wherever they went. The idea that Bangkok has a small Muslim population was not listed as a factor for choosing Thailand. Although, I do believe that their adherence to their belief did provide them the mental and psychological strength to flee Syria.

dignity, factored into their decision to leave. Families were preoccupied with finding a place of their own where they could support their own family instead of being confined to overcrowded houses with no privacy or place to sleep comfortably. **Safety and security** was the most important motivator for those fleeing Syria, as they needed their **families** to be safe, secure, healthy, and together. Most went to Bangkok because a family or friend had already relocated there, showing that **community** was an extremely important factor in the decision making process. The potential to access **freedoms and opportunities** was considered, and families chose Bangkok because of this. Ultimately, families wanted to be resettled to Europe so that they would be able to, for the first time, obtain a nationality, which would allow for freedom of movement and the right to vote. Finally, **education and learning** opportunities were discussed and considered in reaching their decision.

What this research shows is that refugees in the pre-flight phase do have agency and that they consider options in order to make important decisions about migration. While stress and trauma might interfere with the decision making process, as described in Chapter 2, it does not mean that these particular decisions are irrational or predominantly driven by fear, but based on a combination of reason, values, and capabilities. This is especially true in the information age as those wishing to seek asylum can examine multiple options without having to travel, allowing for more informed decision-making.

Concluding that refugees have agency and are resilient and resourceful is a departure from some of the rhetoric used in the international refugee regime. For example, UNHCR officers and NGO staff often discourage the use of the word 'migrant' to describe a person who should legally be labelled a 'refugee.' Their reasoning is often that using the word 'migrant' indicates choice, when refugees, according to them, indeed did not. Maintaining the correct label is politically motivated and useful to ensure that the correct laws are enacted to protect vulnerable populations. However, its use creates a label that is synonymous with lack of choice and agency. The denial of the existence of agency interferes with our ability to truly understand the situation, and is a hindrance in engaging appropriately with refugee communities. Ultimately, the power of this particular label perpetuates the denial of agency to refugees by reinforcing the use of inappropriate policies and practices.

7.2. The Structural and Institutional

This thesis has provided detailed insight into the structures and institutions that create the context for refugees in Bangkok. The context in Bangkok is adverse, where refugees face many obstacles and struggle to meet their needs. The structures and institutions which create this

context include Thai history and culture, the subsequent policies and practices, the limited ability of service providers to work within the context, and the culture and policies of humanitarian aid provision.

7.2.1. Thai History and Culture

According to Winichakul (1994), Thailand has a long history of nation-building where Thai national identity is based upon a unified Thai race and culture, and a strict definition of what is 'un-Thai.' In this sense, the 'other' is created and ethnic minorities are kept on the periphery, unable to integrate, and denied their basic rights. The exclusion of outsiders is an institutionalised part of society, and is a barrier to integration for anyone who is not Thai, including irregular migrants and refugees.

Policies and Practices

This research finds that Thailand's policies towards asylum seekers are based on two major societal dispositions: non-integration and deterrence. Policies of non-integration have meant that refugees within the borders of Thailand are restricted to camps and those who are found to be residing in urban centres will be arrested and held in detainment centres. Policies based on deterrence, on the other hand, attempt to discourage refugees from entering Thailand.

Globally, even countries in the developed world, or the Global North, tend to implement deterrence policies at their borders in order to dissuade refugees from even attempting to enter the country (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway, 2015; Hathaway, 2006; Pickering and Weber, 2014; Silove et al., 2000). Thailand as a tourist dependent country cannot implement such policies without harming its tourist sector. As a result, Thailand must open its airports and borders with minimal restrictions for entry. However, Thailand implements policies of deterrence by attempting to discourage refugees from seeking asylum through placing limitations on their ability to access basic needs, denying access to basic human rights. Essentially, the Thai government attempts to make conditions so inhospitable that those within the country leave, and that others will not come, knowing the difficulties they will face. This is something the Thai government and service providers described as 'mitigating pull factors.'

The policies and practices in place that are meant to discourage refugees from entering Thailand caused Palestinian-Syrian refugees to struggle to achieve wellbeing in all four domains. **Education,** for example, was restricted; although legally, all children were granted the right to education regardless of citizenship, barriers to enter were extremely difficult to overcome. For example, children were required to speak fluent Thai and many security risks existed in traveling to and from school. The lack of access to education for children left parents feeling helpless and

depressed. Watching their children 'waste' their lives was one of the worst outcomes of being a refugee in Bangkok, according to community members. Parents felt that they had failed their families and their children.

The lack of access to **health care** was a major problem in the community. Families could not afford health care, and, coupled with the high levels of stress, refugees began to experience exacerbated health issues with no access to treatment. Issues like Ahmad's overactive thyroid were not treated, which led to extreme weight loss, mood swings, depression, and very low energy levels. Nadia, due to her digestive issues lost all of her teeth and suffered from malnourishment. Ziad, who was only in his mid-20s, suffered from an illness that could not be identified where he would lose consciousness suddenly and for prolonged periods. Not only were people unwell, but the rest of the family experienced higher levels of stress as they worried about the wellbeing of family members.

Refugees could not legally work in Thailand and engaging in the informal labour market was difficult due to the lack of security. The lack of **livelihood** options meant high levels of stress and concern about finances. This level of insecurity also contributed rifts and violence in the community. Those who found work or opportunities struggled to maintain dignity in their new roles, which often led them to quit. Those who were able to find work were commonly women and younger men, causing a shift in family dynamics. This made it difficult for middle aged, male family members to cope and adapt as they lost their sense of dignity and identity.

Finally, the lack of **safety and security** caused extreme levels of stress and distress for families as they lived in fear of being arrested and sent to the Immigration Detention Centre. In addition to this, the lack of safety and security impeded their ability to seek livelihoods options, to socialise, or to move out of negative living situations. The lack of protection also created a life of impunity where community members, landlords, employers, and others could, and often did, exploit and harm refugees.

Thai Government and Service Providers

Deterrence policies imposed by the Thai government also affected UNHCR and other service providers by limiting their ability to work with refugees. The Thai government kept a close watch on operations and exercised control as they saw fit. For example, service providers were required to reapply each year to obtain permission to work with urban populations, and the government retained the right to shut down operations at any time without notice. Service providers were also restricted from working with certain populations, such as the Vietnamese Hmong and the Uighur population from China.

This had a profound impact on the operations of UNHCR and other service providers and affected the day-to-day lives of refugees. First, refugees were constantly struggling to understand the complex and ambiguous situation and felt lost and abandoned. Second, service providers struggled to coordinate in this complex environment, which led to institutional inefficiencies and poor service delivery for refugees. Overall, due to the context, service providers were not able to make good use of resources and could not effectively advocate for the rights of refugees.

7.2.2. Service Providers: Culture and Policies

Generally, humanitarian workers, especially those working with refugees, face immense pressures, not only from the institutions in which they are employed, but impose pressure onto themselves (Walkup, 1997). Research from Walkup (1997), Harrell-Bond (2002; 2003), and Lopes Cardozo et al. (2012) show that this immense pressure and failure to alleviate the suffering of others leads to negative coping strategies which include overwork and burn out, detachment, transference, and reality distortion.

In Bangkok, the service providers showed evidence of the above coping strategies, which adversely affected the lives of refugees. The lack of resources coupled with high demand created a stressful environment for service providers, which led to a high level of burnout. Some chose to leave their posts, meaning a high turnover and lower efficiency. For those who stayed, they coped by detaching themselves from refugee communities. Organisations created and ran programmes with little knowledge of and without having ever having visited communities. This led to the creation of irrelevant programmes that members of the Palestinian-Syrian community had no use for and chose not to utilise. Transference was demonstrated by service providers in their dismissal of complaints of refugees. They tended to see the problems refugees faced as the fault of the refugee's own poor choices and because they did not utilise the services available.

As a consequence of both detachment and reality distortion, UNHCR and NGOs failed to relay important information to refugees. When refugees sought information, UNHCR employees responded by saying that 'it is not their right to be resettled' and that they should stop calling. This left refugees from the Palestinian-Syrian community feeling abandoned and afraid. Many were concerned that they might have to return to Syria or that they might be trapped in Thailand, struggling to access their basic needs, indefinitely. The uncertainty led to overthinking, obsessive thoughts, and the 'creation of reality'. Members of the community stated that they felt that they were reduced to a status below an animal. Not only were service providers unable

to provide basic needs, they exacerbated wellbeing failures by leaving refugees to feel less secure and unable to actualise their values.

Due to the lack of any formal support, refugees turned towards informal networks to access resources. Informal service providers were useful for overall wellbeing, as they did not treat refugees like helpless victims, but people with agency who wanted to work to better their situation. Informal service providers were able to ask refugees what was needed and help them to attain those resources. They were also useful as they did not necessarily deliver 'handouts' but helped to enable and empower the community to go after what the community felt that they needed.

7.3. Strategies to Achieve Wellbeing

This research shows that earning a livelihood is essential to survival, but in itself is not sufficient to be well. Human dignity and values cannot be separated from livelihoods strategies; individuals are constantly making an effort to maintain and achieve wellbeing while trying to survive. Ryan and Sapp (2008: 76) show that competence and growth are also important for wellbeing and that, as people, we have intrinsic motivation to engage in activities that 'exercise, expand, and express one's capacities.'

For the Palestinian-Syrian community this aspect of their values system was apparent. They valued their education, skills, and abilities. Motivated by diaspora and generations of statelessness, Palestinian culture valued the freedoms and opportunities that they had created through building human capital. Livelihoods strategies reflected the need to be seen as independent and successful in the eyes of the community, and to earn sufficiently to take part in and contribute to the community. Therefore, what one does to survive is as important to wellbeing as the income that is required to survive. Most importantly, Palestinian-Syrians refugees had a strong need to take care of their family, providing opportunities and safety and security for their family.

Findings from this research have shown how wellbeing strategies are adjusted when expectations are not met or strategies fail. Essentially, when strategies are met with overwhelming challenges and result in wellbeing failures, people will be forced to adapt and adjust expectations, making trade-offs, and employing new coping strategies. People will then employ new strategies based on these adjustments. Over time, due to these adjustments and trade-offs, their overall wellbeing will diminish. Simply stated, the more trade-offs Palestinian-Syrians made overtime, the worse off they were.

7.3.1. Stages: Expectations, strategies, and failures

This research provided a deep description of the four stages the community members encountered from their arrival in Bangkok. These stages included 1) the arrival, 2) developing a greater understanding of the situation, 3) seeking assistance/community organisation, and 4) isolation and independent strategies. In each stage refugees had a number of expectations, engaged in strategies to meet goals based on these expectations, and then encountered a number of challenges which led to wellbeing failures.

Arrival

In the arrival stage, families assumed they would be living in Bangkok for three to six months and planned to 'lay low' and wait to be resettled in Europe, North America, or Australia. Families planned to live off their savings until then. However, families discovered that they would be in Bangkok for at least a year and that they did not have enough savings to allow them to survive.

Developing a greater understanding

In the next stage, adult males began to seek employment in the city, walking up and down the streets of the Arabic district of Bangkok. However, this accomplished relatively little, as jobs were difficult to secure. Work that was available was seen as beneath the dignity of community members; it was either poorly paid or located in areas in Bangkok where immoral activities were taking place (e.g. red light districts).

Seeking assistance/building a community

When the initial strategies failed, Palestinian-Syrians sought assistance in the Thai-Muslim community in Bangkok. Members of this community helped the Palestinian-Syrians to form a community organisation. Initially this was a highly effective strategy. The community was aware of what it needed to be well, and it pooled its resources in order to try to achieve those things. Doing so allowed the community to actualise their values and brought them closer to the achievement of wellbeing. However, the group was led by those who had no experience leading community based organisations or civil society groups. The organisation also lacked support of outside institutions, such as UNHCR or NGOs. This contributed to the making of many detrimental mistakes, such as lack of transparency and accountability, and the community organisation failed and dissolved. The failure of the community was mostly based on a lack of transparency, which heightened levels of distrust over time. The breaking point came with the arrest of eight community members from the Ramkanhaeng community. After this, the fear and lack of information created a rumour mill that continued to damage to the cohesiveness of the

community. As a result, the condition of the community worsened as Palestinian-Syrians sought to isolate themselves.

The breakdown in the community and the lack of trust was exacerbated by an important additional factor: idleness. Steady employment was only available to a few, and for those who were offered opportunities, many would rather quit than face the undignified situation presented. The lack of work and productive activities to occupy their time meant that many were idle all day. Many reported that this felt like 'torture' or 'hell' and idleness contributed to a number of psychological issues, most specifically worry and rumination. Left to overthink and analyse situations in an ambiguous and insecure setting, Palestinian-Syrians began 'to create reality' through spreading rumours.

Isolation

In the fourth stage, rumours were frequently and continuously spread in the community. Overall, rumours and 'the creation of reality' were used for two main purposes. The first was to fill in the gaps in information, as Allport and Postman (1965) suggested. The second purpose was to create a reality that justified their choices and explained changes, as community members were pressured to live in a way that was inconsistent with their values. For example, refugees would make other community members into enemies, saying they were stealing from the community, blaming them for their current conditions. This coping strategy, as suggested by both Allport and Postman (1965) and Turner (2001), was used to ease the mind of the individual forced into a state of unknowing and distress. While it may have settled the mind temporarily for some community members, it contributed to rifts in the community, making the situation worse over time.

Because of these rumours and the lack of trust, many community members began to live in isolation. As a result, they had to adjust their strategies to meet their material needs. Many received remittances from family members abroad, received donations, sold assets, and took out loans. Those who were forced to rely on remittances and donations felt a loss of personal dignity, both in the community and amongst their families. Some, rather than accept assistance, preferred to use techniques that were less than straightforward, such as seeking aid through over exaggerating their levels of poverty and suffering while others engaged in more illicit actives. Many justified their livelihoods strategies by reciting narratives that eventually became reality.

As Carver and Conner-Smith (2010) note, and as has been revealed here, people employ other cognitive strategies in an effort to be well. These are meaning making strategies and included

thinking positively, trusting in God's plan, focusing on the strength they have obtained, and focusing on their future. However, while these strategies do help to reduce levels of anxiety and depression temporarily, they do not stand up against the shocks and challenges.

This chapter shows that the challenges and obstacles faced by refugees, which are shaped by the institutional context, directly influence their ability to be well. With each action or strategy they employed, they were met with new obstacles, most of which were outside of their control. Consistent with findings from Cummins et al. (2009) and Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001), exposure to frequent shocks and setbacks resulted in the inability to achieve or maintain wellbeing. The shocks were too great, and people could not recover, plunging them into deeper and deeper states of despair and depression. As a result, people employed coping strategies, most of which were negative and worsened the situation. After only a short time in Bangkok, for many less than a year, refugees began to report that they were 'waiting in hell,' 'existing without being alive' and living 'miserable' lives. This research shows that at some point our ability to adapt and to achieve wellbeing, is hindered when faced with constant shocks.

In conclusion, what this analysis demonstrates is that basic needs were required in order for people to be well, but basic needs were not sufficient for people to be well. Further, when little more than basic needs were met, the psychological repercussions, such as the pain people felt from being left idle for months or years on end, impeded the acquisition of basic needs. For example, when people were left idle they coped by creating stories which created tension in the community, this tension interfered with the functioning of the social networks which were vital to livelihood generation. In this sense, the relationship among objective, relational, and subjective wellbeing could clearly be seen.

7.4. Creating a Holistic Understanding

Overall, this research finds that objective, subjective, and relational wellbeing can be analysed through domains and is dependent upon the realisation of key values. Without the realisation of these values, humans cannot achieve wellbeing. The Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok made many trade-offs in an attempt to live a life that was consistent with their key values; however, the more trade-offs they made overtime, the more they experienced corrosion of their personal wellbeing. For example, after facing continual obstacles many found themselves depressed, paranoid, and partially or completely isolated from those around them, some were even afraid to speak or be seen by 'other Arabs.'

This research finds that Palestinian-Syrian refugees residing in Bangkok did not achieve wellbeing, either in an objective or subjective sense. Even though some had experiences that

they would consider good or positive, all suffered wellbeing failures and were unable to recover due to reoccurring and varied shocks and obstacles. The structural and institutional impediments were too limiting for this community of people and they were unable to live a life that was consistent with their values and were unable to achieve wellbeing. What is worse is that service providers who attempt to assist refugees, not only failed to deliver needed resources due to their institutional impediments, but actually were implicated in worsening the psychological issues refugees face.

Findings from this research demonstrate that psychological wellbeing is strongly linked to material wellbeing. Essentially, material needs are necessary to achieve psychological wellbeing and, simultaneously, some level of psychological wellbeing is needed to attain material needs. For example, when community members began to distrust others, they isolated themselves from the community and struggled to meet material needs. Ultimately, they were forced to engage in strategies that made them psychologically worse off.

This example also shows the importance of relational wellbeing. When community members had better social relations, it also contributed to both their psychological and material wellbeing. For example, when the community was able to organise and act with agency they were able to obtain needs and actualise their values. However, when distrust and paranoia spread throughout the community, their livelihoods strategies failed.

This research shows this particular population, due to the political and institutional context was unable to achieve wellbeing. Positive wellbeing is something our brains are hardwired to experience. We, whether we are actively aware or not, put strategies in place to optimise eudemonic wellbeing. This is according to ancient philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and neurologists. We are resilient and, on a daily basis, place buffers (Cummins et al., 2009) or coping mechanisms in place in order to sustain positive levels of wellbeing. However, when barriers are continuously present, our ability to achieve wellbeing is hindered, and we lose our ability to cope as we simultaneously lose our ability to hope (Folkman, 2010).

As a result of constantly compromising values and adjusting expectations, as shown in Chapter 6, this particular community became worse off over-time. When the community organised in an attempt to combine resources and expand strategies, they failed, as they ultimately lacked any institutional support. In the end, without appropriate or targeted assistance to bolster autonomy, capabilities, and social cohesiveness, the Palestinian-Syrian community became the ‘helpless victims’ that the international refugee regime made them out to be.

Overall, this research shows that refugees do have agency, and are constantly working to achieve wellbeing. However, their options are severely constrained, where limited strategies lead to an increase in the number of trade-offs they must make, decreasing their ability to sustain positive levels of wellbeing. While this research only examines one particular group in one particular context, it builds an understanding of how obstacles can interfere with the wellbeing process and outcomes in any setting. Refugees, especially in the urban context, are constantly having to strategize and think on their feet in order to access resources. When strategies are constantly faced with institutional and political constraints, not only will strategies fail, they will result in a sustained process of adaptation that will reduce levels of positive wellbeing.

This is particularly relevant in the case of urban refugees in the developing world as they are constantly working through informal processes in the state of institutional restrictions.

7.5. Why Does Any of this Matter?

In the early days of my research I struggled with the ethics of my research question, was it policy relevant, and if not, how could I justify my research? How could I justify my desire to delve into the lives of refugees, making them relive tragic events just so that I could be conferred a PhD?

It was not until a few months into my research that I began to realise the policy implications of my research. I began to realise how little was known about the decisions and trade-offs refugees made and the detached relationship of service providers. This led me to one of the most important findings of my PhD: *attempting to bypass a deeper understanding forces us to assume that we already know all of the issues refugees face and what is best for them.* If we lack a deep understanding in our search for answers, we are merely building assumptions based on partial information.

7.5.1. Wasted Lives

Third country resettlement is the least common of the three durable solutions for refugees worldwide. The Palestinian-Syrians in some ways are more fortunate than other refugees in the world; they only will reside in Bangkok two to five years before they are resettled in a third country. Refugees in other contexts maintain refugee status for decades, some imprisoned in camps, others imprisoned in urban areas, unable to travel or even change homes. Many of these refugees in the world will spend this time idle, barely able to survive, and by developing coping strategies that dramatically change them as individuals, but allow them to survive. Children are out of school or receive substandard education and very few are able to access adequate health

care. By the time refugees are resettled in third countries, are allowed to integrate, or repatriate, many will have lost years of their lives, let their skills and knowledge atrophy, and have developed a number of psychological and physical health problems.

This research uses the wellbeing approach to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of refugees. Understanding what refugees need to be well and helping them to access the resources necessary is essential to ensure lives are not wasted. Equipping people with what they will need to be successful in their current and future situations is necessary, not only for international development, but as a part of the recognition of basic human rights.

7.5.2. Wasted Resources

The number of displaced persons the world over is increasing dramatically, while budget support for humanitarian assistance is not increasing proportionately. Treating refugees as if they lack agency is not cost effective. Empowering refugees to find their own solutions, utilise their own skills, and create livelihood solutions would not only dramatically improve the psychological state of refugees, but would also serve as a more cost effective solution.

I do, however, recognise the political implications for this assertion. Refugee receiving countries, especially countries like Thailand and most other Asian nations, are less concerned with cost effectiveness and more concerned with containing refugee populations. Allowing refugees the freedom to create their own solutions and independent livelihood strategies would not be a welcomed suggestion, as these governments would see this as creating 'a pull factor.' However, the reality of the situation is that urban refugees are already engaging in such strategies. Refugee receiving countries, especially countries that, like Thailand, have a deficit of skilled and unskilled labour, could stand to benefit from allowing the entry of migrants with different skill sets. They could also benefit by allowing refugees to work and contribute to tax revenue. Ensuring that this group was physically and psychologically healthy would also mitigate welfare costs and facilitate new contributions to the local economy. In addition, third countries of asylum, such as countries in Europe and North America, might also be motivated to contribute to programmes, with the understanding that refugees will then be more likely to be resettled as a healthy, educated, and well-trained population. However, it is ultimately about changing our thinking about refugees, how we interact with communities, and develop programmes. We must also consider how we talk about refugees and advocate for their rights.

7.6. Contributions to Wellbeing Research

The findings from this thesis provide an original contribution to the wellbeing research. First, this research shows that the wellbeing framework can be used in the refugee context and is useful in building an understanding of their situation. While psychological wellbeing and specific aspects of life necessary for wellbeing, such as health, have been looked at closely in relation to the refugee experience, a holistic approach is often neglected. This framework contributed to refugee literature as it was used to examine the refugee experience from the perspective of the refugee and views the refugee as a person with agency, but also allows us to view how policies and structures have implications for the wellbeing of the individual.

Second, the application of the wellbeing framework is an original contribution as it allows for the use of one tool in which to build an understanding around multiple phases of the refugee experience. Most research looks at only one phase, and frameworks have been developed in which to view those phases in isolation, but this framework allows us to follow the refugee trajectory, no matter which direction it goes, with one framework. This research also provides an original contribution by providing a useful lens in which to view the 'pre-flight' and 'flight' stages, which are highly under researched in psychological wellbeing studies. It is also useful as it allows us to see how the entire experience is inter related, and how past experiences can influence current situations.

Third, this research shows how the wellbeing framework can be used to assess the needs of individuals, families, and the community as a whole. This research shows how the wellbeing framework can be used to list essential values, what is necessary to achieve those values, and how the context is relevant in either wellbeing is achieved or sustained.

Fourth, this thesis also contributes to wellbeing research in general by providing a context in which to utilise a pre-existing framework, which shows the strong connection between wellbeing as a process and an outcome. This research builds upon previous research by viewing wellbeing as a strategy in itself, or a cycle of strategies where outcomes result in the next actionable steps. This makes an original contribution to the research by building a model in which to view failing strategies.

7.7. Limitations and Implications for Further Research

7.7.1. Limitations of the Study

This study had a number of limitations based on methodology, sample size, participants, and resource constraints. In this study I chose to develop a deep understanding of the situation in

which refugees in Bangkok found themselves, trading breadth for depth. While this helped me to answer my research question, it did create limitations.

First, choosing to build a deep understanding, using the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach, was extremely useful. It allowed participants the space to describe and explore their situation and provide valuable insight. I was able to understand their hopes, fears, and their experiences, an opportunity many will never have. However, it did mean that I was only able to interview a small number families or individuals (I was able to do six in-depth interviews). This meant that I was confined to the experiences of only a small number, limiting the ability to represent the entire Bangkok refugee community. What I can draw from their experiences, in many ways, is a starting point for further research.

Second, working with refugees required a number of trade-offs, much of which I describe in Chapter 3. Urban refugees are difficult to access, therefore snowballing strategies work best. However, this means that the population of participants is not representative and may skew results. Also, working with refugees means that subjects covered are extremely sensitive. Due to this is it difficult to know when to push on certain topics or when to let things go that participants might find upsetting. In many instances I often found it difficult to collect the full details on a topic due to this.

Also, due to the sensitivity of subject matter, using focus groups or translators was problematic. There was a general lack of trust in the community and using focus groups would not have been possible, which would have been useful for triangulation. Also, due to a lack of trust, I was unable to use translators.

Third, due to the precarious political situation, working with or talking to service providers was extremely difficult. My research revealed that information passed on by service providers was often shared with an agenda in mind and many biases. For example, service providers would elaborate the effectiveness of their programmes. Also, the propensity to circulate rumours made the creation of a clear picture quite difficult.

Fourth, as I was only there for a brief period I had to listen to stories second hand from the past and found it difficult to corroborate details. I had arrived when the community organisation was beginning to break down, but the community was not making this known yet (I believe they were still holding on to hope things would improve). It would have been useful to collect data from the time of arrival until the time of resettlement.

7.7.2. Implications for Research

This research is the starting point for understanding wellbeing as a process and an outcome for urban refugees in developing country contexts and provides rich description and an in-depth understanding of the situation of Palestinian-Syrians in Bangkok, Thailand. However, in order to take this research forward, to strengthen the role of wellbeing in work and research with refugees, the following areas should be further explored:

Duplicated in SE Asia: building an understanding of Asia rejection

As seen from Section 1.2., the Asian region is home to at least 10 million irregular migrants, however the vast majority of Asian countries lack policies and legislation to protect refugees. This leaves many academics and practitioners to surmise that this is an Asian problem (Davies, 2006), without building a deeper understanding of the socio-political context and the implications of this context. The wellbeing framework would be useful in building and understanding of how the context impacts the lives and decisions of refugees and could have important policy implications.

Empowering Refugees and Social Cohesiveness in First Countries of Asylum

This research shows that when working as a cohesive community, refugees are able to exercise agency and are able to work towards attaining wellbeing. While this research identified issues regarding relational wellbeing and community cohesiveness, further studies could be conducted to allow a deeper understanding of how social cohesiveness can best be built, utilised, and maintained for the benefit of relative wellbeing. While some research has looked into the benefits of community cohesion, less research attains a deep understanding of how benefits can be maximised and sustained in the flight and temporary settlement stages of the refugee experience. Positive examples of this exist in Kuala Lumpur, and might provide lessons or examples for the Bangkok context, as well as others (Hoffstaedter, 2015). We do require a deeper understanding as to how group cohesiveness can be maintained in times of conflict and insecurity and how benefits can be maximised, mitigating the negative aspects such as those discussed in this thesis.

On the Informal

Informal service providers and informal networks have allowed for refugees in Bangkok to access resources, as they are faced with fewer constraints. While research has begun to look

into these informal networks, more systematic research needs to be done to understand the most effective methods and how refugees in urban areas can be supported in accessing networks. Research also needs to be done to understand the best practices and how the benefits of informal support can be maximised and made more efficient.

Relative or Universal? The Experience of Wellbeing

There is a scope for further research regarding both the relative and universal aspects of wellbeing in refugee and migrant communities. Essentially, do values and needs change based on the context, the perceived temporality of the situation, the culture of the refugee sending country, or the culture and institutions of the refugee receiving country? Comparative studies, both comparisons of the same group in other countries or different groups in other urban areas can provide us with a better understanding of the above, allowing the implementation of improved policies to ensure that refugees are able to achieve both psychological and material wellbeing. These studies could also help us to understand which groups are better off, and what factors contribute to this.

Overall, future research should take in account the agency, values, and capabilities of refugee populations from the onset. The argument that refugees, even in the most traumatic and difficult circumstances, are still human beings who avert risk where possible and seek the best outcomes based on their values and capabilities, should not be such a controversial claim. Maintaining an understanding of refugees as people who deserve to be well and who possess agency is essential for high quality research outcomes, for appropriate policies to be implemented, and for efficient and useful practices to be conducted.

7.8. Concluding remarks

Overall, my research has highlighted the agency and wellbeing strategies of people undergoing the refugee experience as a result of one of the most acute humanitarian crises of our time. This research uses the voices and experiences of refugee families to develop a deeper understanding of this experience. I have shown how agency is constrained throughout this experience by the context, adversely affecting their ability to achieve wellbeing. I have provided an original contribution to the literature by applying the wellbeing framework, which allows us to understand the challenges and opportunities that contribute to the wellbeing process. I have explained how a failure to treat refugees as human beings with agency further exacerbates the challenges to achieving wellbeing, rendering the work of service providers as impractical at best or even harmful. I have shown important areas where the agency and wellbeing of refugees can

be affirmed, and ways in which the international refugee regime could better serve the needs of refugees.

My research is a snapshot in time and explores and builds a deep understanding of the situation of Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Bangkok, Thailand. However, these families and individuals will be refugees for the rest of their lives. Even after resettlement, their neighbours will label them 'the refugees from Syria that live on our street.' They will continue to face obstacles, make trade-offs, and suffer in many ways. Therefore, for the purpose of policy and practice and for the sake of being human, it is important that we understand, to the best of our ability, what they have experienced and what they need be well.

The international refugee regime must also keep in mind that wellbeing is not a privilege of those born in the 'Western' or 'Northern' world, or something that should be a concern after refugee resettlement. The international refugee regime, including UNHCR, NGOs, and refugee receiving countries must help to enable and empower refugees to meet their needs and realise their values, rather than to view and treat them as helpless victims. Overall, autonomy, independence, and self-determination are as important as food and shelter in order to live well. After all, what is the purpose of being alive if life is not worth living?

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